

The Baptism of the Lord
January 10, 2021
Reflection by Sister Belinda Monahan, OSB
Is 42:1-4, 6-7; Acts 10:34-38; Mk 1:7-11

This Saturday, when we did lectio in RCIA on today's Gospel, most of the participants—all of whom are seeking to complete various stages of their sacraments of initiation-- focused on the last line. The idea of being a beloved son or daughter of God filled them with joy, hope, comfort. The phrase that stood out for me was “in those days”—and it did not fill me with joy, comfort, or hope.

These days mark the end of the Christmas season—a Christmas season which brought me gratitude that we were able to be present to and for each other in liturgy, but also sadness at our inability to be present to and with oblates, friends, and family—either here at the monastery or elsewhere.

Tomorrow we return to Ordinary Time. I don't know about all of you, but this time—these days--feel anything but ordinary to me. I had set aside a few hours to begin writing this reflection on Wednesday afternoon; and I—as I'm sure is true of many of you—did *no* work at all on Wednesday afternoon. Instead, I spent my time toggling back and forth between CNN and the New York Times commentary. Wondering how we as a country had come to this and how we were going to move forward. Comfort, hope, and joy were sadly lacking.

So, when I did sit down to try and reflect on today's readings, I did so with the events of the last week in the front of my mind. And I have to admit that I found

that Mark's characteristically terse recounting of Jesus' baptism didn't seem to provide many answers to my questions. We have John proclaiming the coming of the Messiah—one mightier than I-- followed by Jesus' baptism and the Spirit's descent proclaiming Jesus as the beloved Son of God.

In today's Gospel, there's no argument about whether or why Jesus should be baptized as in the Gospel of Matthew. Nor does the Baptist provide a lengthy testimony to Jesus as he does in John's Gospel. If John the Baptist recognized Jesus as the messiah or found it strange that Jesus wished to be baptized, Mark didn't find those details important. Rather than elaborating on the relationship between John and Jesus, Mark focuses on the role of the spirit in Jesus's baptism.

We also know that immediately following this Jesus was called by the same spirit into the desert and emerged from the temptations there to begin his public life: One commentary I read suggested that his baptism was also a commissioning, a sending forth. The first letter of John also speaks to the role of the Spirit, telling us that the spirit testifies to Jesus as the son of God, and that the spirit is truth.

And how does this speak to "these days"? To recent events and to the not-so-ordinary Ordinary Time we find ourselves in? I do not know. I know that we too are baptized in the spirit. That we are—each of us here and all of us—beloved daughters and sons of God. That, our recognition of this, as it did for Jesus, commissions us, sends us out to as the letter of John tells us, to love each other as children of God. How this will help us move forward, I cannot say. I struggled to

find a way to end this—because there is no tidy message, no neat take away. I will say that I am going to try to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit as she works on me, on us and in the world.