

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The First Sunday after the Epiphany (A)

Isaiah 42.1-9

Psalm 29

Acts 10.34-43

Matthew 3.13-17

The First Sunday after the Epiphany is also known as the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord.

Isaiah 42.1-9

1. This lesson is taken from a longer section in the second part of Isaiah, in which the salvation of Israel is acclaimed.
 - a. The Servant hears and is saved.
2. The peaceful means of the Servant in establishing justice are in contrast to those of Cyrus, the Persian emperor, whose warlike means have been recited in the previous chapter.
 - a. Cyrus is seen as God's instrument, and yet the Servant embodies the LORD's way.
 - b. The Servant is described as "my chosen," in the manner of Moses (Ps. 106.23), David (Ps. 89.4) and all Israel (1 Chr. 16.13; Isa. 41.8).
 - i. The Servant fulfills the role of the Davidic king (2 Sam. 2.18) and the messianic king (Ezek. 34.23-24), to "bring forth justice".
 - ii. The term used to "bring forth justice" is a technical term, *mišpāt*, denoting a legal decision which ratifies and executes the divine will.
 - iii. The Servant has received the LORD's "spirit". The promise that the messianic king would receive God's spirit is recited at Isa. 11.1, and is, of course, fulfilled in Jesus' baptism.
3. The Servant as God's instrument executes His will in a universal scheme. He is bring forth justice to the "nations" (the *gôyîm*), *i.e.*, God's rule extends to all the Gentiles.
 - a. The means used by the Servant is establishing God's rule are uniquely peaceful.

Psalm 29

1. This psalm is a recitation of God's supremacy and universal rule.
2. Strict monotheism in Judaism dates from about the sixth century, B.C. Thus, this psalm can recite a scene in a heavenly court in which lesser "gods" are addressed by the LORD.
 - a. Regardless of the fact that other "gods" are addressed, the content of the address makes clear that the LORD is supreme.
3. The phrase "the voice of the LORD" is repeated seven times. The effect in Hebrew is suggestive of the sound of thunder, emphasizing God's power.
 - a. The fact that the first mention of the "voice" is that it is "upon the waters," and that seven actions of the voice are recited, has resulted in a very old tradition that the psalm is reciting the establishment of the seven sacraments of the Church.

Acts 10.34-43

1. This lesson is taken from the story in Acts in which Peter has a vision and is summoned to Joppa, to the house of Cornelius the centurion. Cornelius and his household receive the Holy Spirit, and are baptized by Peter, as the first Gentiles to be baptized.
 - a. Very notably, Cornelius receives the Holy Spirit *before* he is baptized. This is unique in all Scripture.
2. The lesson itself is in the section in which the Gentiles first hear the Good News of God in Christ Jesus.
3. In Peter's sermon the pattern found elsewhere in Acts is reversed. In chs. 2 and 3, the schema is one of call to repentance. Here it is a universal proclamation of forgiveness under the One appointed as judge over all the world.
 - a. This matches the conclusion of Paul's speech to the Gentile Athenians (17.30-31), and the argument found at 1 Thes. 1.10 (which is older than Acts).
 - b. The fact that this new pattern of gospel is followed immediately by the incorporation in the Lord's Body through baptism cannot be accidental.
 - i. God's glory is manifested in His universal rule and forgiveness.
 - c. "All the prophets testify about him ..." (v. 43): Compare Luke 24.44-48.

Matthew 3.13-17

1. The baptism of Jesus has been considered (from the time of St. Jerome) to be the first scriptural revelation of the Holy Trinity.
2. The Trinity here is the "economic" Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, with "economy" being the Greek expression for "how something works".
 - a. Jesus' baptism thus also becomes a model for all Christian baptism, for it involves the call of the Father, redemption by the Son, and anointing by the Holy Spirit.
 - b. In Christian baptism we participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus, by the plan and power of the Father and Holy Spirit.
3. The Synoptic Gospels each describe Jesus' baptism. John does not, but relates how John the Baptist saw the Spirit descend upon Jesus (John 1.29-34).
4. Mark's account is straightforward (Mk. 1.9-11). Matthew is concerned, however, with the problem of why Jesus, who is sinless, should be baptized by John.
 - a. Matthew therefore omits Mark's reference to the forgiveness of sins, and adds "Let it be so for now; ..." implying a temporal limitation designed to signify that righteousness is fulfilled.
 - i. Fulfillment of righteousness and the Law is a recurrent theme in Matthew.
5. The reference to "the Spirit of God" uses Old Testament phraseology.
 - a. In Mark and Matthew the vision of the Spirit is private to Jesus ("he saw").
 - b. In Luke (3.21-22) the Spirit is seen by others.

- i. In Matthew, however, the voice seems to be addressed to all (“This is my Son, ...”), whereas in Mark and Luke it seems to be addressed to Jesus alone (“You are my beloved Son ...”)
- ii. The voice may be compared to Ps. 2.7 and Isa. 42.1. Matthew’s use of the phrase “This is my Son ...” may be a specific reference to the usage in Isaiah, reflecting that Jesus is to be the Suffering Servant of God.