



## Baptism of the Lord

Isaiah 55:1-11; Isaiah 12; 1 Jn. 5:1-9; Mark 1:7-11

This is what John the Baptist proclaimed: “One mightier than I is coming after me: I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

In speaking about baptism, we speak about water. Rarely do we link baptism with the Spirit. We stop with the baptism administered by John. But the Spirit is much more revolutionary and overwhelming. To stop at water means to content ourselves with a purification that is beautiful but not as profound, life-altering and interior as the baptism of the Spirit.

The Apostles came to understand this only later. It was the Spirit who turned their view of things upside down: “I will give you the Spirit and you will understand...”

The Spirit detached them from a self-centered, restricted view of things—one confined to their own little territory—and sent them out to the whole world, transforming them into witnesses and martyrs.

Baptism is not entrance into the old temple made up of impressive stones and liturgies. The Apostles came to understand the concept of a “living temple” only after the death of Jesus. It was not a temple built by others for others. Instead, they themselves would be living temples of the Spirit, washed in water but purified in fire. Cardinal Tettamanzi said: “It is the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world and begins his mission, involving us in it as missionaries—persons sent out—to proclaim the joy of the Gospel.”

The Gospel compels us to look at ordinary things in a completely different way. We carelessly reduced this good news to merely an attractive and simple journey—the bearer of fragile dreams. But with the baptism of Christ a new story begins: it starts with a bath in water and ends with a bath in fire. John the Baptist foretold this, saying: “I baptize you with water, but One is coming who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” because profundity and evil demand a twofold cleansing that starts with the storm on Lake Tiberius and blossoms into the “second birth” revealed to Nicodemus. All Twelve followed that route: their baptism in fire in the Upper Room initiated a new “wayfaring” of Christ on earth.

**John saw Jesus approaching him and said:  
“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”**

*Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries,” but rather that we are always “missionary disciples” (EG 120).*

