

Gospel: Mark 1:4-11^{v vi}

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judaeen countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

^v About the Gospel: Mark 1:4-11

In today's reading, Mark recounts the preaching of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. For Mark, John's only message is to point toward the One to come. The title Son of God given to Jesus in 1:1 is confirmed by the voice from heaven. Mark's account implies that the vision and voice were perceived only by Jesus. The appearance of the Spirit in the form of a dove is probably an allusion to Genesis 1:2.

The designation "son of God" is used in the Old Testament for angelic beings (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7), for the nation of Israel (Exodus 4:22; Hosea. 11:1), for individuals (Isaiah 1:2; Wisdom. 2:18) and especially the king (2 Samuel 7:14). The words spoken by the voice are drawn from Psalm 2:7, used of the king and later applied to the Messiah, and from Isaiah 42:1, the first of the servant songs.

Jesus is revealed as both divine Son and as Spirit-filled servant. Yet his identity is hidden from his disciples and other contemporaries, only recognized at the end by the centurion (15:39). Jesus' baptism is a like a parable, at once revealing and concealing his identity and mission—a secret Mark shares with his Christian readers.

^{vi} Reflection and Response

A baptism marks a zenith in human life. Whether for an adult or a child, it celebrates the commitment by one's self or one's parent to a Christ-centered way of life. That commitment echoes throughout every day of our

lives thereafter. This story about Jesus is also about us.

We sometimes avoid our calling with some excuse like “religion is the clergy’s job.” But such a cop-out drains our lives of the meaning and fulfillment they were meant to have. Honoring the fact that we are called in the tradition of Isaiah’s servant and Christ at the Jordan enhances even our most menial chores. Today the readings remind us forcefully that we are intimately loved and chosen.

Not only does God call us; God supports our efforts. “I have taken you by the hand and kept you.” Often in loneliness, sorrow or frustration, we grope for a hand. How it increases our confidence to know that God’s hand is always there. Our challenge is to reach for it and find it, even if it is extended in surprising ways.

God reaches out through the gifts and challenges of every day. The psalmist finds God in the oaks and fires, the calves and oxen, the thunder and water of his experience. God is as intimate as the coarse fabric of daily life. Where do we find God today?