

The Baptism of the Lord

“In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters” (Genesis 1:1-2).

Most Christians imagine God making the universe from nothing. God spoke and “poof” there it is-- the stars, the sky, the earth, the trees. The ancients knew of no such thing. Reread the first two lines of the bible. In the “beginning” there was darkness and the abyss filled with water. God spoke and structure was imposed upon the chaos. God “separated” the waters pushing water “up” and holding the waters there with the solid structure called the “dome” or “sky” and God pushed the waters “down” and held them down with the earth. This conception of creation followed directly from personal experience in that water came down once in awhile through holes in the dome in the form of rain (the waters above the heavens) and if one dug a hole deep enough the hold would fill with water (the waters below the earth). Everyone could just look up and see the blue sky. Of course the whole universe was filled with water.

So let us go back to the “beginning” again and imagine not an empty space universe waiting to be filled with God’s creation, but, rather a vast expanse of water with everything floating around within the darkness like pieces of debris. God who spoke his Word bringing order and form forth from chaos.

Central to this creation story is the Word, God “said.” “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be” (John 1:1-3a).

From the waters of chaos God created something beautiful and good where everything had its name and its place. “God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good” (Genesis 1:31).

The truth of Genesis is very simple: God exists. God willed into existence everything that is. Creation is good. The “how” of creation is a science question humankind is still trying to figure out. The “why” of creation concerns that one little creature God made at the end of the story, humankind. All creation was made for humankind. God wanted to be in a relationship. God wanted to be loved.

Back in the year 2004 a tsunami, a large wave of water, swept over a resort island in the Indian Ocean. Maria Belon and her family were on vacation at the island when the tsunami hit. The wave swept the family into itself and fortunate for them the parents and three children were separated but survived. A movie was inspired by the event and in 2012 *The Impossible* went to the screen. Viewing this movie I could not help but think of the biblical story of creation when I saw the tsunami water filled with all the smashed pieces of the village. The dark waters of chaos return pulling our world back to its original form.

By the time of Jesus humankind had added something to the original waters of chaos. Humankind would imitate the Creator by creating some of its own things like genocide, rape, incest, exploitation of the poor, greed, slavery, slander, the extinction of species, pollution and hate. God's good creation was drowning. According to the Gospel of John Jesus is God the Word returned to this corrupted universe. God came to save all that he had made. Jesus is appropriately called "the Savior". "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

The public ministry of Jesus begins with the Word coming once again to the water. Another "beginning"! Jesus goes to the Jordan River where his cousin, John is administering the Jewish rite of Baptism. This scene is heavily symbolic. The Word has come to save. The Word has come to bring life and light to a universe falling back into the original darkness.

John the Baptist would testify. "I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from the sky and remain upon him. I did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the holy Spirit.' Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God" (John 1: 32-34).

John was a cousin of Jesus and had probably been in his company a gazillion times before that day at the

Jordan River. John has an epiphany when Jesus enters the water. An epiphany is a moment of awareness, a waking up from a sleep when something is manifest which was previously unknown or hidden. The spirit which hovered over the original waters of creation is revealed to John at the water. John is jolted into a new reality and sees Jesus for the first time not as cousin but as the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the Christ. The change is so abrupt when recounting the story John tells us he did not know Jesus when he came to the waters. To say that John is changed by this experience would be an understatement. John knows now his work is finished. His joy “has been made complete” (John 3:29). He says of Jesus “he must increase; I must decrease” (John 3:30).

Have you any sense at all that the world is not as God intended? Do you have a feeling things are falling apart, returning to chaos? Do you experience anxiety or fear? Does the world, do you personally need a savior?

Like the Baptist most of us who call ourselves Christian have been in the presence of Jesus many times. We have participated in Christian worship, Christian prayer, Christian sacraments. The Baptist’s journey is not unlike our own. Many of us still wait for our “epiphany,” a life-altering encounter with Jesus on a personal level. We want the skies to open. We listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit. We long to know Christ as Son of God. Our joy is not complete.

A decision must be made. We must choose to walk out of the waters of chaos and into the river of life. We are not waiting for Christ. Christ is waiting for us. We have been called out of the world and into the Kingdom of God. We must each choose to live without fear. Choose to trust God for our daily bread. Choose to surrender our lives to God, to give God permission to be our God. We must each choose to offer another our coat after they have taken your shirt. Choose to share our resources with the uninsured. Choose to forgive. Choose to bear with one another in all things.

Jesus came to empower each of us to take command of who God created us to be. Pick up the scattered pieces of yourself and be whole again. You can do it with Christ. He came to save. He came that you might be one with Him again. He came that you might know joy.