January 11, 2015
Baptism of Our Lord – “Who’s the Baptist in Your Life?”
Deacon Dave Snyder

Gospel: 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.”

HOMILY
Several faith traditions, especially evangelical and some other Protestant, use rivers and ponds
to perform their baptisms, focusing almost exclusively on adults. Well, George is walking along the
side of a river one Sunday afternoon, and he stumbles along a baptismal service down at the water. He
sees a few people standing in the water, and not knowing what’s going on, proceeds to walk down and
stands next to the Preacher. The minister turns and notices George and says, “Mister, Are you ready to
find Jesus?” and with that, he then dunks George under the water and pulls him right back up. “Have
you found Jesus?” the preacher asked. “Nooo, I didn’t!” said George. The preacher then dunks him
under for quite a bit longer, brings him up and says, “Now, brother, have you found Jesus?” “Nooo, I
did not, Reverend.” The preacher, now a bit frustrated, holds the man under for at least 30 seconds this
time, brings him out of the water and says in a louder tone, “My good man, have you found Jesus
yet?” The weary man wipes his eyes and says to the preacher ... “No, I haven’t; are you sure this is
where he fell in?”

Finding Jesus ... finding the Holy Spirit ... finding God ... in our lives:
- It’s a message that is pro-life: God is in our mortal life from the moment of our
  conception until our passage from this life into the next.
- It’s a message that can help provide some answers, with God’s help, to the questions we
  could have in life – who we are, why we are here, and why things happen the way they
  do.
- It’s a message that begins with faith, continues on with hope, and thrives on love.

Where can we find this message? Right here, my good Christian brothers and sisters, the Good News
of Jesus Christ is the message, found in His Gospel stories and accompanying books of the Bible.
Through the Holy Spirit which we received at our Baptism, this message can come through to us
LOUD and CLEAR, helping us navigate our way through our lives.
WHO helped YOU to find Christ and WHO are YOU helping to find Christ? Put another way, WHO is the Baptist in YOUR life? WHO are YOU the Baptist to?

Our Gospel passage today is almost at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark – you may remember several weeks ago during Advent when we did hear the beginning of Mark. John the Baptist was introduced to the reader, eating locusts and wild honey, clothed in camel’s hair, and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. At the time, both the people around him and the Jewish leaders couldn’t figure out who this fellow was – think about it, if we saw someone walking around today, dressed as a desert hermit and shouting “Repent,” we might be inclined to completely ignore both the person and the message. But the people at the time were looking for something much more in their lives than they had. They remembered from stories handed down from previous generations what they perceived were better conditions under King David and other earlier leaders. They remembered the prophecies of Isaiah and others, and were looking for someone who could give them some meaning in their lives, someone to give them hope for the future, someone who could answer the question, “What’s it all about?” – maybe that sounds familiar to you in your particular life circumstance. The message of the Baptist resounded with the people – they were spiritually hungry – he attracted large crowds and baptized many. And his call for repentance was for more than a confession, it was for a change of heart, a change in one’s outlook, a return to God from a sinful way of life. He was like the prophets from earlier times, and the message resounded loudly.

So, for those of you who watch television, this might be a good time for someone in a GEICO-like commercial to say, “Deacon Dave, I knew all that.” And then, for me, the one sitting next to that person to say, “Well, did you know that … in the 5 verses of Mark’s Gospel that we heard today, John the Baptist completely shifted the focus of his ministry over to Jesus?” The Baptist humbly acknowledged his position – no comparison with the One Who was to follow, the One Who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ introduction to the world in the Gospel of Mark, unlike the other Synoptic writers, did not start with a historical genealogy or a stable in Bethlehem. Mark introduced Jesus to the world as an adult, perhaps 30 years of age, coming from his hometown of Nazareth and joining the crowds around the Baptist. This One Who was proclaimed to be so mighty, this One Who John knew he was to be a messenger for, then humbly joined the others, sinners like you and me, to be also baptized by John. We accept the fact that Jesus was baptized, but did we ever really wonder why? When Jesus was baptized, when He was immersed into the waters of the Jordan, He fully and humbly immersed Himself into the life of those around Him, the life of humanity. He acknowledged and showed to others that He is one of us. But He also showed what we must do in our lives, with our lives. Throughout the life of Jesus, recorded in the Gospel stories, He provided an example to follow, an example which can help provide the answers to the questions on life that we noted earlier, and this example began with His Baptism. Mark’s Gospel tells us that this action of Jesus received a solid affirmation from His heavenly Father, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” And the Good News is that we receive that same solid affirmation from our heavenly Father during our Baptism, when God tells us, “You are my beloved child; with you I am well pleased.”

Who is the Baptist in YOUR life? Who are YOU the Baptist to?
John the Baptist understood what his mission was – as the messenger who prepared the way of the Lord, he introduced others around him to Christ. Like the Baptist, someone introduced us to our life in Christ, someone prepared the way of the Lord for each of us. Certainly, our own Baptism has been the initial springboard into our life as a child of God. But, think back, maybe there are other people in our own lives that have reinforced our life in Christ, who have helped our awareness, by example of the lives they lead or have led, by teaching, by maybe re-introducing us to Christ after a period of being inactive, maybe even a period of being away from the faith. Who are those people and do you recognize them for what they have given you? Do you thank God for them being there when they were? In a similar manner, consider those around you who you might be a John the Baptist figure to, who you could point to Christ, if not during a Baptism, then at other times in life. You don’t necessarily need to be a parent, or Godparent, or religious education teacher – you could be there when you sense a need. You could be there by merely setting an example. Are you ready to do this? Our Baptism starts us on our journey of Faith – of learning about and living out our Faith – a journey that will continue throughout our entire lives. As children of a loving God, through the Holy Spirit that we receive at our Baptism, and reinforced at our confirmation, we are called to prepare the way of the Lord to others, to be a messenger of faith, of hope, and of love to others, to share the Good News of Christ with others, so that they can know where to look to truly find Christ in their lives. John the Baptist recognized his own humility in pointing others to Christ. With the grace of God and driven by the Holy Spirit, we might humbly do the same.

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