

**October 10, 2010**

Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

### **Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings**

St. Luke's account of the baptism of Jesus is contained in a single, closely constructed sentence: "Now it happened, when all the people were baptized, and Jesus---having been baptized---was praying, that heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit, in bodily form like a dove, came down upon Him, and there was a voice from heaven: "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased" (3:21-22).

The reader observes two curious features in the formal construction of this story: First, John the Baptist is not mentioned; Luke, having already spoken of John's arrest (3:20), leaves him out completely. Second, the baptism itself is not of central concern; it has already happened and is mentioned only in a subordinate clause. Luke's focus is directed, rather, to Jesus' experience of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

From a material perspective, there are four details worthy of particular attention in Luke's version of the baptism of Jesus:

First, Jesus' baptism is not isolated from that of the crowd: ". . . when all the people were baptized . . ." The evangelist's stress on this point indicates Jesus' solidarity with the rest of humanity. This solidarity is also addressed by Luke's inclusion---immediately after the baptism---of the genealogy, in which Jesus' ancestry is traced all the way back to Adam (3:23-38). In other words, Luke's mention of "the people" in this place pertains to his larger interest in the humanity of Jesus.

Second, only Luke speaks of our Lord at prayer in the baptismal scene: ". . . Jesus---having been baptized---was praying . . ." This is the first of many times when Luke will speak of Jesus communing with God as other human beings do---namely, by prayer (cf. 5:16; 6:12; 9:19,28; 10:21-23; 11:2; 22:32,41-44; 23:46).

Third, Luke emphasizes the manifest way the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus: ". . . the Holy Spirit, in bodily form [*somatiko eidei*] like a dove, came down upon Him . . ."

Although the activity of the Holy Spirit has already become thematic in Luke's account (cf. 1:15,35,41,67; 2:25,26,27; 3:16), a particular theological note attends the Spirit's appearance in the baptismal scene---namely, this evangelist portrays our Lord's baptism as a public *anointing* by the Holy Spirit. Jesus uses this very expression, in fact, when, in the first words of His public ministry---and quoting the Book of Isaiah---He announces, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, / Because He has anointed Me" (4:16; Isaiah 61:1).

The Spirit's baptismal anointing of Jesus is theologically decisive for Luke. For starts, this event is the chronological *terminus a quo* of the apostolic message (cf. Acts 1:21-22). In respect to this anointing, moreover, Luke goes on to quote St. Peter's assertion that the Gospel "began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God *anointed* Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (10:37-38 emphasis added).

Fourth, in Luke's version of the baptism---as in Mark's==--the voice of the Father addresses Jesus directly. He does so twice: "*You* are My beloved Son; in *You* I am well pleased" (emphasis justified by the grammar of the Greek original). We take note of the vigorously repeated *I/You* structure.

The proclamation of Jesus' sonship hardly comes as "news" to Luke's readers, of course, who recall the announcement of Gabriel: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (1:35).

Nor does this identification come as "fresh information" to Jesus. More especially, the Father's word should not be heard as Jesus' "vocation," in the sense familiar to the Hebrew prophets. It was nothing of the sort. Eighteen years earlier, after all, He had asked His parents, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about the things of My Father?" (Luke 2:49)

The Father's voice expresses, rather, a heightened reassurance; as St. Peter remarked of this scene, "God was with Him." The Father's word is an encouraging response to Jesus' prayer. It conveys, more intensely, the Father's presence and loving approval. Luke's emphasis is, thus, on Jesus' experience.

©2010 Patrick Henry Reardon

**All Saints Orthodox Church**  
**Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America**  
4129 W. Newport Avenue / Chicago, IL 60641  
Church Office: (773) 777-0749  
<http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/>

**Father Patrick Henry Reardon, Pastor**  
[phrii@touchstonemag.com](mailto:phrii@touchstonemag.com)

**Pastor's Daily Biblical Reflections:**  
[www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html](http://www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html)

**Pastoral Ponderings:**  
[http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral\\_ponderings.php](http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral_ponderings.php)