

The Baptism of the Lord 2021 “Does Our Life Point to Jesus?”

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The Gospel readings for the second and third Sundays of Advent focused on the ministry of St. John the Baptist and so it is fitting that we conclude the Christmas Season by reflecting on him once more. St. John is an interesting historical figure. Not too many people know that he had a small following even after his death. In the first century, a group called the Mandaeans went so far as to reject Jesus altogether while continuing to follow the teachings of St. John. This group however disappeared rather rapidly because, as the Gospels point out, St. John is rightfully regarded as the greatest of prophets precisely because his life and ministry pointed directly to Jesus, the Son of God.

On this feast day of the Baptism of the Lord, we are reminded of St. John and his fervent belief that his ministry pointed to Jesus. It is therefore a head scratcher that Jesus would submit to being baptized by John. Shouldn't it be the other way around? However, it is profound to consider that Jesus also didn't see his life as being about himself. By becoming incarnate and sharing our human nature, Jesus made it very clear that his presence in history was about us. That is what we have been celebrating this Christmas season.

However, I am also struck that when the Father in Heaven speaks, it is clear that the focus is not on himself either but on his Son Jesus. The same can be said of the Holy Spirit who descends upon Jesus like a dove. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in their love for each other. In our baptism, we too recognize that our lives are not about us because we have been united to Jesus' divine nature. This is only possible because Jesus united himself to our human nature. All of this illuminates why St. John the Baptist's life was not about him. His life pointed to the Lord.

My friends, this past week we all witnessed a historically bad day in our nation's history. The division in our country about the election and how our elected officials are handling the coming transition is on full display. And, the division isn't just felt in our capital or between political parties, the division is also felt within our own families. Family members are finding themselves taking out their frustrations on other family members. And this is how the devil operates. Whatever the chief blessing in your life happens to be, that is where the devil will attack you. It is so predictable. You can set your watch to it. If your family is your chief blessing, the devil will use anything he can; politics, news stories, human frailty and even religion in a warped way to tempt you to act unlovingly to those most dear to you.

I therefore think this Sunday's emphasis of the Baptist's life pointing to Jesus is an important one for us to consider during these times. As baptized followers of Jesus, we can ask ourselves the question: Who does my life point to? If I were to summarize my life in a single headline, what would it be? In light of everything going on in our country and world today, perhaps the better question is: what should it be?