

The Baptism of the Lord

January 11, 2026

Readings

Is 42:1-4, 6-7
Ps 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10
Acts 10:34-38
Mt 3:13-17

Donald X. Burt, O.S.A.
1929-2014

The baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of his public life, the beginning of the preaching of the new relationship between God and human beings.

John was a symbol of the old arrangement, an arrangement whereby God had a chosen people that he especially protected as the crucible from which the Messiah was to come. John preached to his Jewish listeners: “The promise made to you as a chosen people is about to be fulfilled! The Messiah is near; repent your sins in preparation!” Jesus preached, “I am the Messiah and the whole world is saved! Come and believe!”

It was an amazing message for humans of his day, and for us too. We are so separated as a species, suspicious of each other, damning as ignorant those who see things differently, branding as evil those who do not vote as we vote. We are afraid of each other, intolerant, dismissive.

It seems that even Peter had trouble understanding. Thus we find him after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus saying to Cornelius and his friends: “In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.”

It is a shame that we don’t use that norm in our acceptance of each other. How fine the world would be if every human would say: “Any person who is God-fearing – who does not

pretend to be king of the universe, who is willing to admit that they are not perfect – and who acts uprightly is acceptable to me.”

It is an important principle for us to make our own. Jesus in his preaching made it very clear that we cannot make his message of universal salvation real for us unless we love God and love each other. But we cannot love what we will not understand. Jesus came to save all humans but all humans will not necessarily be saved ... mostly because we continue to treat some of our brothers and sisters as discards of the human species, not worthy of our attention much less our love. On this feast of his Baptism, Jesus has this simple message for us: “If you do not pay attention to each other, how do you expect me to pay attention to you? When you discard the least of your brethren, you discard me.”