

the world'), unless it is understood as the Christian form of 'cosmology', is always ecclesiolatry, the Church considered as a 'being in itself' and not the new relation of God, man and the world.

For the life of the world: sacraments and orthodoxy / Alexander Schmemmann. 1973

Related topics

For further study:

Baptism; manifestation; incarnation; sacraments; sacramentality; salvation; soteriology; Jesus Christ; Son of God; discipleship; conversion

Closing Prayer

God of salvation,
in the river Jordan you bathed your Son Jesus in glory
and revealed him as your obedient servant.

In spirit and in power
rend the heavens and come down to us.
Strengthen us to acknowledge your Christ,
that we who are reborn in his likeness
may walk with him the path of obedience.

Grant this through Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
in the splendour of eternal light,
God for ever and ever.

*Opening prayers. Baptism of Christ, Year B*⁵

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⁵ *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*

Baptism of Christ (First Sunday of Epiphany)

Sunday between 7 and 13 January inclusive

Principal Service readings

Genesis 1.1-5

In the beginning ...

Psalm 29

Give praise to the mighty Lord

Acts 19.1-7

Baptism of the disciples of John at Ephesus

Mark 1.4-11

The proclamation of John and the baptism of Jesus

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

John the Baptizer

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Mark 1.4-11 NRSV¹

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

The setting of the proclamation of John the Baptist is the River Jordan, that flows through Lake Galilee. Jerusalem and Galilee are the two major settings of Jesus' ministry, but also have theological importance. Galilee is where his ministry begins, and Jerusalem is seen throughout Mark as the place of opposition. In Mark, Galilee is the place of the awaited manifestation of the risen Jesus (see 14.28; 16.7).

John the baptizer appears (1.4), and is thus identified as the messenger of Exodus 32.20 and Malachi 3.1, and as the voice of Isaiah 40.3. 'Proclamation' is the characteristic activity of Jesus (1.14, 38-29), the disciples (3.14; 6.12), and of the post-resurrection Christian community (13.10; 14.9). John baptizes, but this is not a baptismal rite; it is rather a more informal 'dipping', or 'immersion', or even 'washing oneself'. However, there are water rituals of purification known from the Old Testament,² as well from the Qumran community. John does not seem to be forming a baptismal community around himself. He does, however, seem to be popular, for people come out to him from the whole countryside and from Jerusalem (1.5).

John's appearance recalls that of an Old Testament prophet, Elijah (2 Kings 1.8). A 'hairy mantle', according to Zechariah 13.4, is a sign of a prophet. In Leviticus 11.20-23 locusts are among the winged insects that may be eaten.³ 'Wild honey' is found among the rocks (Deuteronomy 32.13), from trees (1 Samuel 14.25-26), and even from an animal carcass (Judges 14.8-9).

John has an expectation of the one who comes after him, that 'he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit' (1.8). Since Jesus does not do this in Mark, the reader is directed beyond the gospel. The baptism of Jesus is mentioned briefly, but more weight is given to the inaugural vision. The heavens are torn open (1.10) and communication between earth and heaven is enabled.⁴ The Holy Spirit descends, and a voice comes from heaven (1.11) with words of divine acceptance reflecting different Old

² Leviticus 14.5-6, 50-52; Numbers 19.13, 20-21. For interior purification see Isaiah 1.16; Psalm 51.7.

³ The people at Qumran ate locusts, according to CD 12.14.

⁴ See also Ezekiel 1.1; John 1.51.

Testament texts: 'You are my Son' (Psalm 2.7); 'in whom my soul delights' (Isaiah 42.1-2); note also 'I have put my spirit in him' (Isaiah 42.1b).

Quotations

1

The Church does not dispense the sacrament of baptism in order to acquire for herself an increase in membership but in order to consecrate a human being to God and to communicate to that person the divine gift of birth from God.

Unless you become like this child / Hans Urs von Balthasar. 1988

2

But sometimes I think what the church needs most is to recover some of its weird. There's no sense in sending her through the makeover montage of the chick flick when she'll always be the strange, awkward girl who only gets invited to prom on a dare. In the ritual of baptism, our ancestors acted out the bizarre truth of the Christian identity: We are people who stand totally exposed before evil and death and declare them powerless against love. There's nothing normal about that.

Searching for Sunday: loving, leaving, and finding the church / Rachel Held Evans. 2015

3

It is not a gathering of 'escapees' from the world, bitterly enjoying their escape, feeding their hate for the world. Listen to their psalms and hymns; contemplate the transparent beauty of their icons, their movements, of the entire celebration. It is truly cosmical joy that permeates all this; it is the entire creation – its matter and its time, its sounds and colours, its words and silence – that praises and worships God and in this praise becomes again itself: the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity, the sacrament of the new creation.

Of water and the spirit: a liturgical study of baptism / Alexander Schmemmann. 1997

4

There has been a rediscovery of the meaning of baptism as entrance and integration into the Church, of 'ecclesiological' significance. But ecclesiology, unless it is given its true cosmic perspective ('for the life of