

January 10, 2016 First Sunday after the Epiphany: The Baptism of our Lord

The Collect: Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting.

Amen.

The Old Testament: Isaiah 43:1-7 read from the Revised Standard Version Bible

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, every one who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

The Word of the Lord

Psalm 29 read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer

1 Ascribe to the Lord, you gods, * ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

2 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his Name; * worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

3 The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders; * the Lord is upon the mighty waters.

4 The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice; * the voice of the Lord is a voice of splendor.

5 The voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees; * the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon;

6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, * and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.

7 The voice of the Lord splits the flames of fire; the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; * the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

8 The voice of the Lord makes the oak trees writhe * and strips the forests bare.

9 And in the temple of the Lord * all are crying, "Glory!"

10 The Lord sits enthroned above the flood; * the Lord sits enthroned as King for evermore.

11 The Lord shall give strength to his people; * the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.

The Epistle: Acts 8:14-17 read from the Voice Bible

Meanwhile word had reached the Lord's emissaries in Jerusalem that the message of God was welcomed in Samaria. They sent Peter and John to pray for the Samaritans. They were especially eager to see if the new believers would receive the Holy Spirit because until this point they had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus but had not experienced the Holy Spirit. When Peter and John laid hands on the people, the Holy Spirit did indeed come upon them all.

The Word of the Lord

The Gospel: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 read from the God's Word Bible

People's hopes were rising as they all wondered whether John was the Messiah. John replied to all of them, "I baptize you with water. But the one who is more powerful than I is coming. I am not worthy to untie his sandal straps. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing shovel is in his hand to clean up his threshing floor. He will gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn the husks in a fire that can never be put out."

When all the people were baptized, Jesus, too, was baptized. While he was praying, heaven opened, and the Holy Spirit came down to him in the form of a dove. A voice from heaven said, "You are my Son, whom I love. I am pleased with you."

The Gospel of the Lord

Closing Prayer: On January 16th we celebrate the life of Richard Meux Benson, a priest in the Church of England and founder of the Society of St. John the Evangelist, the first religious order of monks in the Anglican Communion since the Reformation.

Born into a wealthy family of London in 1824, Benson was taught at home by a private tutor and entered Christ Church, Oxford. After his degree and ordination and a curacy at Surbiton, in 1850 he became vicar of Crowley, Oxford.

In 1858 Benson conducted a retreat for priests using material taken in part from the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola. In 1859, having erected a new parish church dedicated to St. John the Evangelist, Benson also planned a mission to India, but abandoned the plan at his bishop's request.

In 1865, two priests joined Benson in Cowley to begin community life under the name of the Mission Priests of St. John the Evangelist with Benson as the superior. At the time there were only convents of Anglican women in England.

The form of religious life Benson instituted was not purely contemplative—its members engaged in active external ministry—but they recited the Divine Office together daily in the church. Benson also emphasized contemplation. The brothers were to have an hour's meditation daily if possible. The community also took a summer retreat of four weeks, later reduced to a fortnight. Benson prescribed other retreat days and silence days. As a religious founder, he concentrated on essentials, among which he advised life-vows (taken with precautions as to maturity); regular confession; choir office, prayer and meditation; and priestly ministry. Benson fully recognized his bishop's authority over the community's priests, who were clergy of the diocese, but not as extending to their private life together.

From 1870 to 1883 the society spread to the United States, India and South Africa. Benson himself made an American mission tour. In 1884 the society adopted a constitution and rule that Benson drafted. During the society's formative phase, Benson continued his duties as a parish priest. In 1886 he resigned this ministry to devote all his attention to the society and its mission.

In 1890 Benson stepped aside for another to be elected superior. He spent one year in India and eight years at the American house in Boston. The season of Lent in 1895 he spent in Baltimore, giving lectures at several churches.

The last sixteen years of Benson's life were lived at home again. He celebrated the Eucharist as long as he could stand at the altar. During his last years, he was wheeled in a chair to receive communion every morning. He died on January 14th, 1915.

Let us pray: Gracious God, you have inspired a rich variety of ministries in your Church: We give you thanks for Richard Meux Benson, instrument in the revival of Anglican monasticism. Grant that we, following his example, may call for perennial renewal in your Church through conscious union with Christ, witnessing to the social justice that is a mark of the reign of our Savior Jesus, who is the light of the world; and who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**