

February 1, 2015

## A VOICE FROM HEAVEN

Matthew 3:13-17

Imagine you are a college acting teacher. You direct the school's dramatic arts course. And you occasionally offer special classes which are open to the community. Now, imagine Jimmy Stewart (or, Brad Pitt) walking through the door one night wanting to brush up on his skills by learning some of the new things (new to him, maybe) that you have to offer. You're stunned to see him and in awe to meet this Oscar winner. All you can say is, "I should learn from you!"

Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized in the Jordan River, not because he needed to confess any sins, not because He needed to repent, but because being Baptized would "*fulfill all righteousness.*" (v. 15) The time would come, after a few more years, when Jesus would bear my sins and suffer for my guilt on the cross. Perhaps His Baptism, this moment of cleansing, is washing away those stains before they are even there.

Perhaps this is the moment that fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy where he said, "*He will bear their iniquities... He bore the sins of many.*" (53:11, 12) When did God actually impose our sins on Jesus? Was it only through the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane? Was it only as He suffered on the cross? Or, could it have begun at this point? Could it even have been at the moment of His Birth? Jesus came to take away the sins of the world! I believe those sins could have upon Him even at the moment of His Incarnation! Yes, He would die to redeem us all, but, He came to fulfill all the purposes of righteousness. He fulfills my righteousness, and He fulfills your righteousness. We cannot fulfill it ourselves. We need a Savior!

Baptism is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace! Jesus accepts this sign as He accepts the purposes of grace for His life. He has not yet begun His ministry, but He is always fulfilling His purpose, His mission. Perhaps He is fulfilling all righteousness by His *example* as well. We do not just follow Jesus' ideas. We follow His example. Just as He was Baptized, we too are to be Baptized. And... just as He gave Himself as a sacrifice on the Cross, we too are to live sacrificially. We are to give ourselves graciously to perpetuate His perfect example. And He gives us the example of His Baptism.

At that moment, "*heaven opened!*" At the moment of His Baptism, when "*He went up out of the water,*" (v.16) something that had never happened before was experienced. Heaven was opened and "*the Spirit of God descended like a dove*" coming to rest on Jesus. Some scholars have suggested that it was at this moment that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit. But they don't want to accept Jesus as the true Incarnation of God. God became human in Jesus...at the moment of His conception! Jesus is not a man who *received* the Holy Spirit. He *is* the Holy Spirit in human form! He is God in Three Persons – the blessed *Trinity*! This is what we believe!

What happened at that moment was an outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual reality of the fulfillment of all righteousness. The One on whom our sins were poured is the One on whom the Holy Spirit was poured. And because He was righteous, because He was pure, because He was innocent, because He was guiltless, there was not only a visible sign, there was an audible sign! There was *a voice from heaven.* (v. 17)

The Word of God, the power of God, the fullness of God was acknowledged before all who could hear it at that moment. It wasn't just Jesus who could hear this voice, and it wasn't just John the Baptist who could hear this voice. Everyone heard it. It was miraculous – a voice... from heaven!!! *"This is My Son, Whom I love, with Whom I am pleased!"* (v. 17b)

It was for the benefit of all who heard it. There could be no doubt – Jesus is the One! Jesus is the Son of God! The Spirit of the Lord was upon Him! He was anointed! Not only by the act of Baptism, this only affirms it. Not by the Voice, this only confirms it. And not by anyone's acceptance of it, it can't be denied.

The One who saves us was, like we are, Baptized! And now, it is by Baptism in His Name, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, that we are truly cleansed. Washed! It is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. And it is when we are Baptized by the Holy Spirit that the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are truly children of God and the righteousness of Christ fulfills our righteousness, and we hear echoed in our hearts that wonderful Voice from heaven, saying, *"These are my children, whom I love, with all of them I am well pleased!"*