

Mark 1:4-11

If a Christmas story is one that announces the birth of God's new plan of salvation, then Mark's Gospel contains a Christmas story. This Christmas story is the account of Jesus' baptism. Just as the other gospels reveal their entire plot through the gifts of the Magi, the Word made flesh dwelling among us, or the song of the Christmas angels, so Mark's Gospel does the same.

For Mark what's essential, what's the Gospel in a single phrase, is the message Jesus hears once he goes down under the river water in solidarity with the entire blighted human race, and jumps up out of the water again. The heavens are torn apart, like sheets being ripped up for rags, a dove descends on him, and a voice fills his ears and all the depths of his soul: "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased".

If you are looking for hope, then remember these words for in a sentence they contain the entire good news of the Gospel. "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Jesus accepts baptism as an act of solidarity with the entire human race. His baptism is an enactment for all the world to see, there on the banks of the Jordan, of what it means for the Word to become flesh. This is why the baptism story is also a Christmas story: In a single word, Emmanuel God with us. God for us. God among us. God for us all, and if God is for us, then who dares to be against us? So, joy to the world, the Lord has come! And if you're looking to find him, there he is! He just jumped into the river water to get baptized for the love of you and me.

Our baptism into Jesus means we hear the same voice he hears. The same message from heaven is aimed at us. God speaks to us as he speaks to Jesus, and says the same thing: "You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased."

. Write that message from heaven on your heart. Write it on your hand as though it were crib notes for a test. Write it on a piece of paper and slip it in your wallet or stick it in your bathroom mirror. Do whatever you have to do to remember this and not forget that God says to you personally: "You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased."

Better yet, listen for that message Listen carefully to the cracks and crevices in your life, and by God's grace, that message will sound forth. It may come as a whisper, it may come as a shout, and some days it may even seem like a mumble, but that message will be there, What God does is keep saying it, whether or not we choose to listen: "You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased."

And this learning to listen cannot stop with ourselves. Indeed, why should it? We can help people to listen. To share our faith with others means helping them listen and hear the message God speaks to them constantly: "You are my beloved child; with you I am well pleased."

God has been made manifest at Christ's Baptism: the Spirit, who descends from heaven as an empowering gift; the Son, To this Trinity of wondrous love be praise and glory, now and forever. Amen.