

**The Baptism of the Lord
(Year A)**

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7—The Servant of the Lord

1. The Servant: “my chosen,” upon whom “I have put my spirit” (42:1-4, 6-7)

Psalms 29—The Voice of the Lord

1. Voice of the LORD (Hebrew *qōl*): upon “the waters” (cf. Gen 1)

Matthew 3:13-17—The Baptism of Jesus

1. John the Baptist: objects; “I need to be baptized by you...” (cf. Heb 4:15)
2. Jesus: “it is fitting to *fulfill* all righteousness...”; what does this mean? (3:15)¹

Sin = Debt

“Forgive us our *debts*,
(Greek *opheilēma*)
as we forgive our *debtors*”
(Greek *opheiletēs*)
(Matt 6:12)

Righteousness = Wage

Beware of doing *righteousness* before men
in order to be seen by them; for then you
will have no *wage* (Greek *misthos*)
from your Father who is in heaven.
(Matt 6:1)

Heavenly Treasury

“Do not treasure up for yourselves *treasures on earth*, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but *treasure up for yourselves treasures in heaven*, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your *treasure* (Greek *thēsauros*) is, there will your heart be also. (Matt 6:19-21)

Sinful Actions = “Fills Up” Treasury with Debts

[Y]ou are sons of those who murdered the prophets. *Fill up* (Greek *plēroō*), *then, the measure of your fathers*. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? (Matt 22:32-33)

Righteous Actions = Pays Down the Debt of Sin

“If you would be perfect, go, *sell what you possess and give to the poor*, and you will have *treasure* (Greek *thēsauros*) in heaven; and come, follow me.” (Matt 19:21)

The Death of Jesus: A “Ransom” for Sinners

The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and *to give his life as a ransom for many*.” (Matt 20:28)

¹ Nathan Eubank *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew’s Gospel* (BZNW 196; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 121-132.

3. New Isaac: “this is my beloved Son...” (3:17; cf. Gen 22:1, 15)²

The Living Tradition

Catechism: We also call these spiritual goods of the communion of saints the *Church’s treasury*, which is “not the sum total of the material goods which have accumulated during the course of the centuries. On the contrary *the ‘treasury of the Church’ is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ’s merits have before God. They were offered so that the whole of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. In Christ, the Redeemer himself, the satisfactions and merits of his Redemption exist and find their efficacy.*” (CCC 1476)

Pope Benedict XVI: Looking at the events in light of the Cross and Resurrection, the Christian people realized what had happened: *Jesus loaded the burden of all mankind’s guilt upon his shoulders; he bore it down into the depths of the Jordan. He inaugurated his public activity by stepping into the place of sinners. His inaugural gesture is an anticipation of the Cross...* The Baptism is an acceptance of death for the sins of humanity, and the voice that calls out “This is my beloved Son” over the baptismal waters is an anticipatory reference to the Resurrection. This also explains why, in his own discourses, Jesus uses the word *baptism* to refer to his death (cf. Mark 10:38; Lk 12:51). Only from this starting point can we understand Christian Baptism. Jesus’ Baptism anticipated his death on the Cross, and the heavenly voice proclaimed an anticipation of the Resurrection. (Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1.18)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (Baptism of the Lord, Year A)

1. What is the mission of the Servant in Isaiah?

2. How does Jesus fulfill the Jewish Scripture by submitting to his baptism by John? Why does Jesus have to be baptized with a “baptism of repentance” for sinners if he himself is without sin (cf. Heb 4:15)?

² Leory Huizenga, *The New Isaac: Tradition and Intertextuality in the Gospel of Matthew* (NovTSup 131: Leiden: Brill, 2009), 153-88.

3. Before studying the Gospel for this week, what was your view of baptism? After looking at the Gospel through eyes of Pope Benedict, does this add to the way you see what happens in baptism? What happened on the day you were baptized?

For Further Study

1. Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*. New York: Doubleday, 2007. Pp. 9-24.