

# Homily for the feast of The Baptism of the Lord

January 12-13, 2019

Readings: Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Acts 10:34-38; Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

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The world was waiting for a savior, waiting for someone who would fulfill the prophesy of Isaiah. This savior who would be a light to the nations. This savior would open the eyes of the blind, and would establish justice on the earth. People wondered, could John be the long-awaited Messiah? Then Jesus came onto the scene.

In today's Gospel the Spirit comes upon Jesus and God is delighted! What God does for Jesus, God does for John and in fact for each of us. The lectionary for today's suffering servant reading from Isaiah leaves out one verse. Verse 5 tells us that the God who created the heavens and earth "gives breath to its people and spirit to those who walk on it." That's us! All of us! Today we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus, and we are reminded that God's Spirit is within us. At our Baptism the Spirit came upon us and God was delighted.

Now we leave the Christmas Season and move into Ordinary Time. We may ask, if we believe God shared the Spirit with us, how do we allow that Spirit to work in our lives? Does God call each of us to be a servant? What does it mean to be a servant? We sometimes think this means something big and showy. However, sometimes it is a small act of kindness. Sometimes it may be a change in our own perspective.

Many years ago, my husband answered an article in *The New York Times*. A group called Women against Nuclear War were looking for Americans to become pen pals with people in the Soviet Union.

My husband, Bob, a middle aged Roman Catholic who grew up in the anticommunist '50s signed up. He became a pen pal with Alex, a rather young inquisitive atheist man of the communist Soviet Union. They became fast friends and shared all about their lives. Alex was hungry for news about the free world. Bob sent magazines and whatever he could. Alex told him to be careful because mail was opened.

One Advent we decided to send a box of food to Alex and his young family. Alex was an engineer but lived from hand to mouth. As we were packing the box, we realized it would cost at least \$40 to mail this small package. Forty American dollars would go a long way in St. Petersburg in the early '90s. We knew that even if a letter with a check or money order arrived unopened, it would still be difficult for Alex to cash a check from an American. How could we get the money to him? Bob knew a co-worker who lived in England who often went to St. Petersburg. We wired the money to him and he was able to hand the \$40 to Alex.

Several weeks later on a gloomy December day a post card arrived. On the outside was the picture of a Russian Church. The message said, "Dear Bob, I went in this church and lit a candle for your birthday. It will be strange to hear the name Robert in a Russian Orthodox Church." Alex, a rather young atheist, lit a candle for an American child of the '50s.

This felt like a small light in a rather dark world. I am not that sure that our actions changed Alex. I am sure the experience changed our attitude about people across the globe. Perhaps it is easier to see people across the globe in a new way than it is to see a family member, neighbor or co-worker differently.

God placed the spirit within us knowing the world would always be in need of saviors. The world would always need people who would help others begin to look at things in a new way. Jesus was born and walked among us in order for us to know what it means to live a spirit-driven life. God became human to show us how to bring light to a dark world. Jesus came to teach us a new way of looking at how to live a life based on the care of others. When we open our hearts and minds to people with whom we disagree and we look at things from a new perspective, the blind begin to see and hearts are changed. God is delighted!