

Sermon for the Baptism of Our Lord

'He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire.'

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The crèche is being left behind. The image of our Lord's Nativity is passing. No longer are we to gaze upon the holy child, cradled by His ever-blessed mother; Joseph keeping watch, as both kings and shepherds render their adoration to the infant God.

Now we look upon this Jesus, who *'has his winnowing fork in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; to burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.'* For St. John tells us that the Lord's baptism, His washing, will be *'with fire.'*

Our Lord comes to St. John to be baptized, and the heavens herald the voice of the Father: *'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'* For it is written, *'The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders.'*

Here the Lord Jesus is given His mission by the Almighty. In the Jordan is He shown the purpose of His coming.

Now we see why it is that distant kings brought tributes of gold, and burned incense as to a dreadful God before the Holy Infant. Now we witness why the Sacred Virgin Mary *was greatly afraid.*

'For the voice of the Lord is powerful, His voice is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaks the ceders of Lebanon.'

The glory of the Lord Christ has been announced. The *voice which breaks the ceders* calls down to Jordan. The Son is chosen, *beloved, and pleasing.* And He shall *burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.*

It was an old idiom of American English to refer to Jesus simply as 'the Man'. And with this idiom in mind did a certain cultural icon sing: 'The hairs on your arm will stand up at the terror of every sip and supper; the whirlwind is in the thorn

trees, and 'till Armageddon, there will be no peace; and either you will partake of the last offered cup, or disappear into the potter's ground, when the Man comes around.'

This cultural icon was no fool, for he ended his song by saying: *'I looked and behold: a pale horse. And his name, that sat on him, was Death. And Hell followed with him.'*

It is too easy for us to always and ever imagine our Lord as sweet and soft, lowly and listening, caring and kind. At Christmas, we look upon the 'little Lord Jesus' hidden in the arms of His beautiful mother. But do you not know that this is the God who shall break the nations? He is hidden in the arms of his humble mother before the visage of Joseph, as divine fire was hidden within the branches of the burning bush before the eyes of Moses, *'and Moses hid his face, for he was greatly afraid to look at God.'*

'The fear of the Lord is beginning of wisdom.' And before the Lord should we be greatly afraid. Before God made flesh should we bow down, and offer tribute, and burn the incense of worship. For this is He who is *'enthroned over the flood; the Lord who sits enthroned as king forevermore.'*

A king is not merely a ruler. A king is a man of war; his crown shows him not as a governor of a people, but a leader of an army. For this reason it was a scandal that King David did not go out with his army to war, but stayed comfortably confined within his palace. But the Lord Christ is not like his father David, who cowered. He is like His Father, The Lord of Angels, who rained upon the Land of Egypt burning hail, who touched the earth, and struck the ungodly with all His wonders; who consumed Sodom with sulfur, and made ashen the city of Gomorrah.

Who spoke softly, saying, *'Behold the ears of the uncircumcised, they shall not listen; the word of the LORD is to them an object of scorn, and in it they take no pleasure, Therefore I am wrath, and weary am I of holding it in. Pour my fury upon the children in the streets, and upon the gathering of the young men. Their houses shall be overturned, their fields and wives stricken. For I will stretch out*

my hand against the inhabitants of the land.' 'Thus saith the Lord.'

The Word who has been scorned is made flesh. His Father who is a king of battle has blessed Him, and in Him is the Father *'well pleased.'*

'The fear of this Lord is the beginning of wisdom'. Therefore, 'Be wise, O ye rulers of the earth' and 'kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way.'

For Christ arises from the waters. From the river He seeks out His foe. Shall he vanquish mankind, who has scorned His word? Sinful men are weak, and beneath him, *'for what is man, that you are mindful of him?'* We, mankind, who were created *very good*, were deceived by a lie; so the Lord of war shall arise from the waters, and seek out the Father of Lies. The Devil has established himself the Prince of this World. He has set himself above all nations, and from the mountains does he beguile the sons of men. The Lord arises from the waters, and speaks to Lucifer, *'Behold, I Myself go forth with a sword on you, and I will destroy your high places.'* *'I will utterly destroy all the places where the heathen whom you have possessed serve you.'* *'For this purpose the Son of God is manifested: that he might destroy the works of the devil.'*

He who comes in terror, now comforts you: *'Fear not, for I will redeem you. I have called you by name, and you are mine.'*

The demons cry out *'Have you come to destroy us?'* The Son replies *'Quiet, and be banished.'*

The children of Adam mourn, *'Mine enemies lie in wait for my life, deliver me, O God, from the work of my foe.'* The Father replies, *'When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, for behold, I am the Lord your God.'*

'And now, I give the Man in exchange for you.' *'My Son, in whom I am well pleased.'*

'Therefore, ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name.' For hear the *'still, small voice'*:

'Fear not, I am your savior. I am with you.'

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