

## **Week 1: The Pilgrim's Journey**

### **Gospels:**

Mark 1:9-15 Jesus' Baptism and temptations, John arrested.

Matthew 6:19-33 Key verses, 19,33, Treasures Sunday

This week we reflect on the treasures of the world tempting us. No matter how much we accumulate, it doesn't seem to be enough. We do not share fairly the bounty of God's love, revealed to us in creation, rather it polarizes us — dividing the rich from the poor, allowing many to be undernourished, stressed out and under-employed. We frequently seek the upper hand in relationships, living in the fast lane and yet, deep down, we know we don't want to live that way. There is a better path, a more genuine journey.

In the desert, Jesus confronts the same temptations we do when we feel lonely, deprived or vulnerable. We are tempted to fill this spiritual hunger with possessions and other distractions, trying to live as if God does not exist paying attention to the idols of the world. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus implores us not to store up earthly treasures, but to trust in the living Trinitarian God. During this Lenten season let us apply these words from Jesus' baptism to ourselves: "You are my beloved child; in you I am well pleased" Mark 1:11. We are never alone, and now we walking this Lenten journey together.

### **Discussion Starters:**

1. As we set out on our journey through Lent, for what do we long?
2. Who or what is calling us to leave the daily pattern of our lives for a while, and spend this time together, to pay attention to the meaning and purpose of our journey?
3. In response, how shall I make time and space to journey into my heart with our travelling God?

# The Baptism of Jesus



## Some Notes about the Icon:

- At the top the Holy Spirit is descending upon Jesus as a dove, the Holy Spirit is depicted in a Mandorla. St. John Chrysostom emphasizes that the Gospels state the Heavens were opened and the Spirit descends upon us so that we can ascend with Christ and the Spirit to the Father in Heaven. For the first time since the fall of mankind, the Heavens were opened to us.
- At the top to the left, John and Jesus pantomime their conversation about the propriety of Jesus receiving John's baptism; while on the right a prophet holds his message.
- The angels on the right side are waiting to attend and dress him after the baptism is over. Angels are not mentioned in the scriptural account of the baptism, but they are almost always presented in the iconography. Perhaps they are included because the baptism is read together with the temptation in the wilderness, which followed it immediately, and after which the gospels report that "the devil left Jesus, and suddenly angels came and waited on him (Matthew 4:11)."
- John the Baptist, while baptizing Jesus is usually turned away or looking at the Spirit descending upon Christ. This signifies that Theophany is about elevating Jesus Christ. If this were an Olympic race, it would be as if the Old Testament (John the Baptist and all before him) were passing the baton to the New Testament (Jesus Christ and all of the saints).
- Sometimes there is an axe near John the Baptist, which reflects his warning that our lives must bear the fruit of the Spirit or else we will be removed. We cannot get comfortable or spiritually lazy.
- Jesus is not submerged in the water, for creation was baptized in Him, not vice versa.
- The river banks are quite crowded. There are mothers on both banks of the Jordan, dipping their children into the baptismal waters. This same icon shows about a dozen people standing around watching the baptism. These could be Jews coming to John for the baptism of repentance and religious leaders debating among themselves the validity of John's message.
- Lastly, the strange little creatures riding fish at the bottom represent the Jordan River and the Sea, both fleeing at the sight of something much bigger and greater than themselves entering the water. As it says in Psalm 113:3 – The sea beheld and fled, [the River] Jordan turned back.

## **Extract from Unwanted Tasks**

*by Joyce Rupp*

Drifters we are, pilgrims,  
too. And sometimes  
exiles fearing we will  
never get back to  
the place inside that  
cradles us like home.

We let ourselves be  
imprisoned by what  
we do not want, missing  
the elegant life  
sashaying among  
the undesired duties

## **A Reflection for Pilgrims**

Take some time to gather wisdom for the continuing journey:

What captured my attention?

What surprised me?

What moved me?

What changed me?

What is my hope for me and for my faith community?

What will I take home?

## **A Prayer that we may walk with Christ**

God of salvation, in the river Jordan you bathed your Son Jesus in glory and revealed him as your obedient servant. In spirit and in power rend the heavens and come down to us. Strengthen us to acknowledge your Christ, that we who are reborn in his likeness may walk with him the path of obedience. Grant this through Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, in the splendour of eternal light, God for ever and ever. Amen.