

ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΣ ΠΛΗΡΩΜΑΤΟΣ
Apostolic Church of the Pleroma

*Delivered by Tau Phosphoros
to the Parish of St. Ambelain
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YEAR B - FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY
BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Greetings, brethren, and welcome. We celebrate today the memory of the Baptism of the Lord Jesus at the hands of John the Baptist. This event marks a pivotal point in the life and ministry of Jesus. In the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, this event is followed by Jesus going into the desert for 40 days and nights to be tempted by the devil; and in John it is related that he immediately began gathering disciples. In either case, it marks a transformative moment in the life of Jesus.

The role of John the Baptist is not to be underestimated. It is not without cause that Jesus receives this initiatic sacrament at his hands. According to a Gnostic tradition, Jesus was a member of an esoteric school or circle, in which John was his superior, and which circle of initiates would also include Simon Magus and Dositheus. John the Baptist undoubtedly was a popular and charismatic leader, having many disciples, students, and listeners. And being an enlightened teacher himself, he knew of the importance of the mission of Jesus.

The fact that John is the initiator and Jesus the initiate, does nothing to diminish the divine nature of Jesus and his mission. Jesus himself recognizes the importance of preserving the initiatic chain, even at the protestation of John. The full import of this even, however, seems to have been perceived only by John and Jesus; for we do not read of anyone else noticing the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of the dove, or the voice declaring: "You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased." A voice, incidentally, which, being associated with the Holy Spirit, ought best be imagined as feminine. This is something that we've discussed in the past, but it seemed worth noting. While this may seem like a small or trivial element, and certainly not one upon which to make dogmatic decrees, it is nevertheless an element that corresponds with Gnostic doctrine and tradition, and which may be helpful to the one who meditates upon these Scriptures.

At any rate, Jesus does not go out and simply repeat the works of John, he incorporates the works and message of John in to a much larger plan. Nor does he attempt to usurp John's authority or take John's disciples for himself. Rather, after his further initiatic experiences through his trials in the desert, Jesus assembles his own circle of initiates. It was only upon John's impending death that Jesus begins to speak as if to take over John's ministry. We know, of course, that not all of John's followers went with Jesus. The Mandaeans are an example of the survival of a proto-Gnostic religious movement which counts John the Baptist among its prophets, but which views Jesus as a false teacher, sorcerer, and usurper; some of the same accusations leveled against Simon Magus by some of the early Christians.

Baptism, as it has come down to us in our day, preserves the "baptism of repentance" of John, but it has also been transformed by Jesus into a baptism of the Holy Spirit, as perpetuated by his followers and successors. In our second reading today from Acts, Luke discusses Paul's baptism of the Ephesians, and paints him in a light that is reminiscent of both John the Baptist and Christ himself. When Paul baptizes them, "the Holy Spirit came upon them" just as it had come upon Jesus at the hands of John. Luke goes on to mention that "there were about twelve men," thus suggesting an analogy between Paul and Jesus Christ. Indeed, Paul is an apt model of the Christian Gnostic, being the preserver of tradition, as well as receiver of gnosis interpreter of Christ's message, and doer of his works.