

**Reflection on the Gospel-The Baptism of Jesus Year A
(Matthew 3:13-17)**

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The Baptism of Jesus marks the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of Ordinary Time. In many places, it coincides with the end of the Christmas break, a return to work and to the regular patterns of life. Some of us have been lucky enough to get some 'down time' after Christmas, time to reflect on the past year, alone or with loved ones, and to set goals for the year ahead, to move into Ordinary Time with renewed life and vigour. It will be a different sort of Ordinary Time for those in the Philippines who suffered devastating losses as a result of Typhoon Haiyan and who still struggle to rebuild their lives and their homes. Such events raise our awareness of the changes that we can expect as our planet warms. They alert us to our particular personal and global responsibilities in this respect.

The baptism story is an initiation or commissioning story. We are invited to hear it against the backdrop of the first reading from Isaiah 42. Jesus is God's chosen one on whom God's Spirit rests. The voice of God commissions God's chosen to bring forth justice, sensitively and without fanfare; to be a light to the peoples; to open the eyes of the blind and to set the captives free. A Spirit-filled life consists in fulfilling such a mission.

In the Matthean account of the baptism, "the heavens are opened" and Jesus sees God's Spirit descending on him "like a dove". While the image of the heavens opening presents an outmoded three-tiered understanding of the structure of the cosmos, we might nonetheless appreciate the sense it evokes of the all-encompassing cosmic nature of this commissioning event. God's words are addressed to all who listen to the gospel: "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Jesus' mission is to be understood in terms of "righteousness" or right relationship. Jesus' insistence that John baptise him despite John's reluctance points to the reversal of values that will characterise his mission. There is no pursuit of status or personal aggrandizement in a gospel way of life. Right relationship lies rather in respecting as God's creation the entire Earth community, in bringing forth justice and setting the captives free. Each one of us can make a difference to the "ordinary time" of those with whom we share life on this planet. The image of "the heavens" opening might serve as a reminder of the destructive effects of human-introduced space debris and of our responsibility to promote global legislation that might inhibit further devastation of this kind.