

**Reflection on the Gospel-The Baptism of Jesus Year C  
(Luke 3:15-16, 21-22)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Today's feast marks the end of the Christmas Season and the beginning of Ordinary Time. Over the Christmas season, the liturgy invited us to reflect on and to experience the various comings of Christ in our world and to open ourselves to the action of God's grace at work in our encounters with the living Christ. The readings from Luke's gospel have taken us from the birth of Jesus to the story of his personal decision at age twelve to remain in God's house, the Jerusalem Temple, listening to the teachers of the Law and astonishing them with his answers to their questions.

Now, as an adult and along with "all the people", Jesus receives John's water baptism. The crowds are wondering if John the Baptist is the Christ or Messiah, God's anointed one. John points the people away from himself and towards Jesus who "will baptise ...with the Holy Spirit and fire". Did Jesus also engage in a ministry of baptising the people "for the forgiveness of sins" or is John's reference to Jesus' activity of baptising with the Holy Spirit and fire a metaphor for the distinctive features of his future gospel ministry? In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke's second volume, the presence of the Holy Spirit is marked by tongues of fire. Fire is a powerful symbol that functions as a threat on the one hand and as a source of energy and light on the other.

Jesus is God's Chosen One, the Beloved, on whom God's Spirit rests. In light of the first reading from Isaiah 42, the voice of God in the baptism scene commissions Jesus 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. Those baptised into Christ through the ages are baptised "with the Holy Spirit and fire" and are called to the same mission as Jesus and the same sensitive approach to the mission. The fire in our hearts sometimes flickers in the face of life's challenges. We are sometimes guilty of crushing "the bruised reed" or extinguishing the flickering flame of hope. As we move into Ordinary Time with its often extraordinary demands, we might think about stirring the embers and fanning the flame of God's love so that justice might prevail in our world and for our planet - justice without violence, if not without pain.