

The baptism of Jesus

The baptism of Christ II
Daniel Bonnell, 2006
Oil on canvas, 122 x 213 cm
Mount Calvary Missionary Baptist Church, Hilton Head Island



Matthew 3: 13-17 | Baptism of the Lord (Year A)

We are gathered around a contemporary work illustrating the baptism of Jesus. This painting is a composition by Daniel Bonnell, an artist who lives in the United States.

You will be guided through some questions during the meditation, and you are invited to jot down your thoughts as you go along. We begin by entering into a movement of interior silence. I invite you to close your eyes and sit with your back straight, feet flat on the floor, hands placed gently in your lap, if you can. This is a posture of attentiveness, of waiting in expectation, of responding to God's invitation to intimacy.

I now invite you to take three deep breaths, to find the rhythm of your breathing. As we begin, I invite you to focus on your in-breath and on your out-breath, becoming aware of your breathing in and breathing out. This is a practice that brings us into the present moment, where God dwells. We will take 60 seconds to practice becoming aware of our breathing. [Set a timer for 60 seconds]

As your awareness of your in-breath and out-breath begins to come into focus, we invite the Holy Spirit to be our guide:

Holy Spirit, we invite you to be present to us, to open the eyes and ears of our heart, as we listen attentively to what the Lord wants to reveal to us during this time of prayer.

VISIO

Observe: A "reading" of the painting and scripture. Read each comment or question slowly, allowing at least 10-20 seconds between each one. Follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

I now invite you to open your eyes and gaze at the image before you. Allow your eyes to sweep the whole of the picture... Notice the shapes and the colors... Notice the central figure... Notice the dove... Notice if there is a place on the image where your eye is invited to linger... Are you called back again and again to a certain detail or color? Try not to think about it too much... Simply notice where your energy is drawn.

Let us now close our eyes to listen to the Gospel story as if hearing it for the first time.

Read the scripture passage reverently, or ask one or more of the participants to proclaim the text very slowly (to promote internalization).

Now I invite you to open your eyes and look at the image again.

[Allow a moment 60 seconds of silence before continuing...]

What do you see? Look for symbols... What thoughts, words, or questions come to mind when you see this image? What colors stand out to you? What feelings or emotions are evoked in you looking at this image?

MEDITATIO

Meditate: Pondering its meaning. Read each comment or question slowly, allowing at least 10-20 seconds between each one. Follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

How do the warm and cool colors affect you? What comes to mind when you see them? What draws you in... what stirs within you? What does the posture of the central figure say to you? Gently notice the feelings, thoughts, memories, or reactions that are rising within you... How might you describe the image?

ORATIO

Pray responding with commitment and fidelity. Read each comment or question slowly, allowing at least 10-20 seconds between each one. Follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

As you look at the image a final time, ask the Lord if there is anything you missed. How does this image represent Jesus' baptism? What words, thoughts or images keep coming to you as you look at this image? Is there a link that I can make with my own baptism... or with my understanding of Christian baptism? Ask that the Lord would speak. What might He want to say to you? What might he want to convey to you at this moment?

CONTEMPLATIO

Contemplate: resting in God with confidence and faith.

Our relationship with God is nourished by moments when we take the time to savor God's presence without trying to fill the silence with words. Let us savor the calm of the moment and plunge into the Love that is being offered to us.

We will spend the next 3 minutes in silence resting in the presence of God, allowing us to gather the fruits of this seeing, you will be invited to share any insights, images, thoughts or words that have arisen in you during this experience of listening and seeing with the ears and eyes of our heart.

Time of sharing: it is an important part of the process, allowing participants to deepen their experience by listening to the experience of others and sharing their own experience. This part should be given a good amount of time. Most participants lament that the time allotted for sharing is often too short. Invite participants to share in small groups of not more than four people. Depending on the time allotted for sharing, instruct each participant to share the time equally. Sharing a word or thought in the whole group (if time permits).

Final Prayer

Lord, when you came up from the waters of the Jordan, heaven was opened as you breathed in the breath of the Holy Spirit. All your ministry, since John's baptism, has been animated by this same Breath as the voice from heaven confirmed. Grant us to recognize that we also are animated by that same Holy Spirit, who makes us children of the same Father. Amen.

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