

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22 (The Gospel message for Sunday January 10, 2010)

John the baptizer had been preaching for about a year and a half and was at the height of his popularity when he baptized Jesus and proclaimed Him as Israel's promised Messiah and the Savior of the world. John had roused the nation's interest and now his mission was accomplished. He had prepared the way: "And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not: John answered, saying unto *them* all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:" (Luke 3:15-16 KJV)

John had been baptizing with water unto repentance but Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost," (Acts 2:3-4a KJV) The early Church fathers all taught that there would be a baptism of fire after death when God would purge the wood, hay, and stubble of our lives and make us holy as He is Holy. For the most recent 500 years of the Church's 2,000 year history, this has been a point of contention between Catholics and Protestants.

"Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also was baptized, and praying, the heaven was open, And the Holy Ghost descended in bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." (Luke 3:21-22 KJV) Here we have the Trinity displayed before us as God the Father speaks from heaven, God the Son is baptized, and God the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus.

Rabbi Ben Soma, commenting on the creation story in Genesis, stated: "The Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters, like a dove." (Talmud Chagigah 15a) The passage deals with Genesis 1:2, where the Spirit of God is said to brood over the face of the waters, "just as a dove broodeth over her young without touching them." The supposed distance is described as being three finger breadths.

The Jerusalem Talmud lists 20 references to the voice of God from heaven and the Babylonian Talmud lists 69, most commonly associated with God's voice from Mount Sinai: "And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice." (Exodus 19:19 KJV) The voice of God out of heaven is referred to as the "Bath Qol". The Hebrew word "Qol" means a loud, thunderous voice, and "Bath" provides a feminine prefix. The voice is described as the "daughter voice" or at least the echo of God's voice.

The Gospel of John records that this was the sign that John the baptizer was looking for: "And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." (John 1:33 KJV)

Rev. Brother Christopher R. Klein
Deacon Rector, the Chapel of St. Maximillian Kolbe
The Anglican Province of Christ the Good Shepherd