

**THE MYSTERIES  
OF LIGHT**



## FIRST MYSTERY OF LIGHT

### *The Baptism of Jesus*

*"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."—Luke 3:22*

What child wouldn't love to hear such words from their parent? Such simple words, but possessing such an impact. Some adults spend their lives seeking the approval from their parents that they never received as children—words of praise sincerely spoken by a parent. Sometimes it takes so little and can mean so much. Certainly this was a source of great strength to Jesus, enabling him to do many things. Without this affirmation, would he have had the courage to confront the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, to boldly chase demons out of those possessed, heal the sick and forgive sins?

In Luke's Gospel these words are spoken directly to Jesus; in Matthew's Gospel they are spoken for the benefit of the crowd. In one instance they are words of affirmation spoken to Jesus; in the other they are spoken about Jesus to let us know who this man is. Later, in the Transfiguration we are told to listen to Jesus in a passage that parallels that of Jesus' baptism. It is a call for all of us to recognize who this man is and to follow him.

Certainly, Jesus was God, but the question remains as to how and when he became aware of this. Was it from birth, or was the awareness developed over time? Just as small children are not able fully to grasp concepts adults can grasp, perhaps as a child Jesus' ability to grasp his identity was limited by his human form. Just as children's identity develops slowly over time and

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needs affirmation from significant people around them, perhaps Jesus' sense of identity developed over time to finally be confirmed with his baptism and these words from his Father. Regardless of how and when Jesus came to realize his identity, his relationship with his heavenly Father was a close one, a source of strength throughout his adult life.

Words of affirmation spoken by a parent are important for a child's developing sense of self-worth and identity. How much more powerful when spoken by our God. These words spoken to Jesus are also spoken to each one of us. We are children of God and, as such, are beloved. In times of trials when I am discouraged and wonder whether or not what I am doing makes a difference, these words are a source of comfort to me. They give me the strength to go on in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The knowledge that our heavenly Father is proud of me keeps me going. Without it I would never be able to live up to the challenge posed by our baptism—the challenge of following in the footsteps of Jesus.

*"This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."—Matthew 3:17*

## SECOND MYSTERY OF LIGHT

### *The Wedding at Cana*

*Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.—John 2:11*

How remarkable that Jesus should perform his first miracle at a wedding, and at the request of his mother, no less. Perhaps he had much bigger ideas. Perhaps he had wanted his first miracle to be truly spectacular, right up there with Moses' parting of the Red Sea. Perhaps the idea of changing water into wine at a wedding had seemed rather trivial and unimportant in light of all the other needs pressing for his attention. I know it probably would have seemed so to me. Why waste a miracle on a party? Wouldn't it be better used to cast out a demon or raise someone from the dead? And yet, performing a miracle at a wedding party is precisely what Jesus did, out of respect for his mother, and we continue to reap the benefits of his action.

In a world where marriages are often under attack and where as many as half of all marriages end in divorce, Jesus reaffirms the importance of marriage by his actions. He raises to the level of a sacrament this civil union. He reaffirms the importance of the fourth commandment, as well, in his respect for his mother, honoring her request above his own wishes. He affirms the importance of celebrating these significant moments in our lives. In our American society, a society of workaholics with increasingly less leisure time, everything doesn't always have to be about work. Sometimes God's

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will is that we celebrate with family and friends and give praise to God through our celebrations.

This miracle is also a reminder that God works in many ways. What may seem insignificant to us may prove to be the most important thing we do in this life. What may have seemed like an insignificant act on the part of Jesus has taken on greater significance over time and continues to be a source of reflection for future generations.

Jesus was obedient to his mother in honoring her request and the waiters were obedient in doing what Jesus told them. In the same way we need to be obedient in response to what God asks of us, regardless of how seemingly insignificant.

*His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." —John 2:5*

## THIRD MYSTERY OF LIGHT

### *The Proclamation of the Kingdom and the Call to Conversion*

*"Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."—Mark 1:38*

Jesus in Mark's Gospel is a man on the move. He is a man of action. He has a mission and wastes no time in setting about accomplishing this mission. In the course of the first chapter, Jesus is baptized, tempted in the desert, calls his first disciples and performs many miracles, including curing a demoniac, a leper, Peter's mother-in-law and many others. To read this chapter in one sitting is enough to leave you breathless. Of course, three years is a relatively short time to do something. No wonder he was in such a hurry. He had no time to waste in proclaiming the Good News of God's kingdom. But what about us, those of us living today? Certainly we cannot keep up the pace that Jesus set. Paul was similar to Mark's Jesus in his sense of mission and urgency to spread the Good News. How do we preach the gospel in our day and age? We, who are not anticipating the imminent arrival of the Parousia. We, who have family concerns that take up our time. We, too, are called to preach the gospel. How do we do it?

There are days when I wonder, have I somehow gone astray? Have I lost the idealism of my youth when it comes to following Jesus? Sometimes it feels like it is all I can do just to stay afloat. There are bills to pay, tuition

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checks for Catholic schools, home repairs, car repairs. There are many things that need to be maintained in a home. There are doctor bills, orthodontist bills, bills for glasses, dentist bills. Then there's food and clothing to buy, meals to prepare, dishes to wash, laundry to do. Some days I feel that all I am doing is surviving, much less preaching God's word.

But Jesus only had three years, I have a whole lifetime to be faithful to God's word and preach it with my life. The time and energy I put into my home and into my children is not time wasted, but time put to good use in that they, too, need to learn to love God and serve him.

I can't keep up the pace that Jesus sets, but I don't have to do that. I have many more years to love and serve God while on this earth. In that my heart is turned to God and I sincerely seek to do his will, I can feel confident that in some small way I, too, am doing my part to bring about God's kingdom. I need a lifetime to do just a small portion of what Jesus did in three years. But that's okay. God will supply the rest.

*"The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head." —Mark 4:26-28*

## FOURTH MYSTERY OF LIGHT

### *The Transfiguration*

*Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.—Matthew 17:1-2*

There are times when our children are transfigured before our eyes. When they are cleaned up, in their Sunday best and singing in the children's choir at church. Or when performing at a recital, or when you catch them unaware showing maturity beyond their years in speaking to a friend or performing an act of service. These are the moments for which parents live! They are glimpses of the adults our children could be, glimpses of them at their best. Yes, these glimpses are rare and short-lived as these same children quickly destroy any lingering illusions we may have about them by running through the school halls or fighting with their brothers or sisters. Still, these moments are all the more precious for being so few and far between. It's almost as if our children want to let us know—don't get any funny ideas about me being like this all the time! They don't want to get caught doing a good deed because of the expectation that it might raise in us. They don't want us to pitch a tent and expect them to continue to act that way any more than Jesus would let Peter pitch a tent.

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Peter, James and John catch but a glimpse of Jesus' glory, but it was enough for Peter right away to want to set up camp and remain there—one of the great dangers of such mountaintop experiences. So often when they occur we want to hold on to them when we can't. We have to come down from the mountain. Jesus wisely brings them back down and instructs them to tell no one, lest they get some funny ideas about him and try to make him king. Our children bring us back down to earth, at times quite rudely, lest we get any funny notions about who they are meant to be, rather than allowing them to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling over time. They don't want to be locked into our expectations of them any more than Jesus will allow us to lock him into any box of false expectations, any more than any of us want to be locked into other's expectations of us.

So, we all must come down from the mountain in good time. But while those moments last, enjoy them for what they are—just glimpses of the glory that awaits for those who love God.

*Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here."—Matthew 17:4*

## FIFTH MYSTERY OF LIGHT

### *The Institution of the Eucharist*

*Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated.—John 6:11*

When I meet with parents preparing for their child's first Eucharist, I like to do a simple exercise. First, I ask the parents to think back to their own first communions and to write on a sheet of paper the first thing that comes to mind. Then I ask them to share their responses with others. Usually there is a lot of laughter as the parents recall the clothing they wore, the gifts received and parties held. Then I ask them to think about their experience of Eucharist now, as an adult, and to write what comes to mind. This is much harder, as people struggle to find the words to express what Eucharist means to them today. They come up with much more abstract concepts: peace, joy, the Body of Christ, humility that God would come to them. It's a very simple exercise and yet it brings home to them both where their children are in their understanding and how their understanding changes over time. It's also good for them to take a minute to reflect on the place of the Eucharist in their lives, something we often have little time for in all our busyness.

I pray each time that I am involved in preparing young children for receiving Jesus in the Eucharist that through this time of preparation not only will their parents grow in their understanding of this great mystery,

but that I will as well. It is a powerful prayer—one that challenges me greatly.

If we truly believe what we say about the Eucharist, that it is the very body of Christ, then our churches should be packed every Sunday. Not only on Sunday, but each day of the week as well. What is it that keeps us from doing this? Many of our Protestant brothers and sisters don't celebrate communion each week. It is reserved for special occasions, lest in receiving too often communion become commonplace and lose its specialness. I can appreciate this line of reasoning, but I have to wonder: if Jesus had wanted us to reserve the celebration of communion to just special occasions, then why did he use such a common substance as bread? Why not something more festive, such as cake? But Jesus chose bread, a basic staple of life that we might come to know him and grow closer to him. Jesus, too, wants to be a basic staple of our lives, as necessary as the food we eat.

Each time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we say, "give us this day our daily bread." In the same way Jesus wants to come to us each day. Why do we hold back? Lack of time? The inconvenience of fitting a Mass time into our busy schedule? I certainly know these excuses very well for I use them myself.

Still I pray to grow in understanding and appreciation for this great mystery of our faith in which Jesus comes to us in the form of simple bread and wine, basic staples of life and basic staples of our faith.

*"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

*—John 6:35*