

Homily for the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

There is a legend of a cobbler named Conrad.

One night Conrad dreams that the Lord would come to visit him the next day. His heart was singing with joy as he swept his tiny shop to perfection, bought the best food his poverty could afford -- and then waited while he worked. He was vigilant, like the gate-keeper of the Gospel.

The morning passed and the Lord did not come. A beggar with bare feet, shivering in the cold, passed by and Conrad gave him shoes. A child passed who was hungry, and Conrad shared his food. The afternoon passed, and the Lord did not come. But a woman passed by who was weeping at the death of her son, and Conrad spoke to her and comforted her in her sorrow. The night came and the Lord had not come.

Disappointed, Conrad fell asleep. Suddenly the Lord was before him again in his dreams. Conrad reproached Him, "Lord I waited, and you did not come!" And the answer came: "Conrad, I came and you made me welcome! I was the beggar you sheltered. I was the child who was hungry. I was the mother who wept." And Conrad's heart understood. For indeed, the Lord had come.

The story is simple. It's predictable. Yet, it says everything about this feast that we celebrate, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

What we celebrate today began in Advent. It began with anticipation and now the anticipation is brought to a close. The Season of Christmas closes here with Jesus in prayer -- no longer a child -- but on the verge of His ministry. The Father's voice embraces Him and the Spirit overshadows Him. The Beloved Son goes forth to announce the kingdom.

And we -- we are His disciples. We have been reborn in the waters of baptism. And we are called to go forth and announce the kingdom. But we don't do it by preaching sermons -- we do it by living lives that reflect the Lord who is our brother, our teacher, our guide, our redeemer. We do it by reflecting the Lord who was gentle and patient, kind and loving. We do it by treating others the way we would treat Christ and the way we would want to be treated.

There is an old Quaker blessing that summarizes the meaning of today better than anything else. It reads:

When the song of the angel is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoners,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among all,
To make music in the heart.

May we who are baptized in the Lord be one with Him in making God's kingdom known not by our words but by every act, every deed, every moment of our lives.