

January 12, 2025 – Baptism of our Lord

God's Expectations and Faith in the Baptized by Pastor Julio Romero

Gospel: Luke 3:15-22

The son of a wealthy man expected to receive a sports car for his graduation. Instead, his father called him into his study, told him he loved him, and handed him a wrapped gift.

When he opened it, he found a leather-bound Bible with his name inscribed on the spine. Angrily, the young man tossed the box onto his father's desk and stormed out, saying, "With all your money, the best you can give me is a Bible!"

They never spoke again, despite the father's repeated attempts to contact him.

Years later, the young man received a call informing him that his father had passed away, leaving him everything. As he went through his father's belongings, he found the Bible, still in its box. Curious, he opened it. The page fell open to a passage his father had marked, and as he looked at it, he noticed that his father had underlined Matthew 7:11:

"If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?"

As he read this, a car key fell out from inside the Bible. It had a tag with the dealer's name on it—the sports car he had wanted all those years ago. On the tag, beside his graduation date, were the words: "Paid in full, love Dad."

This story mirrors the relationship between God and humanity. God gave the greatest gift humanity has ever received, yet it was rejected. Why? Because the gift of Jesus Christ was not what people expected. It wasn't until later that some, though not all, understood that it was through the sacrifice of God's Son on the cross that all our debts were paid in full, all because of God's love for us.

The Gospel, which recounts the Lord's Baptism and the beginning of Jesus' ministry, is a story of expectations and rejections. It begins with the people who were baptized by John. They had great expectations about John, even believing he might be the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. But John quickly dispelled these expectations when he told them he was not the Messiah and that he wasn't even worthy to untie the Messiah's sandals.

The crowds weren't the only ones with expectations in this story. John himself had high expectations of the Messiah. He envisioned the Messiah as the one who would rid the world of evil, and he painted a frightening picture of this with his words. He imagined the Messiah with a winnowing fork in His hand, ready to clear the threshing floor, gathering the wheat into His granary while burning the chaff with unquenchable fire.

What about Jesus, our Messiah? Did He have expectations of His own? I believe He did. Through His baptism, Jesus was ready to begin His ministry—His mission to spread the Gospel to as many people as possible. He was prepared to heal, reconcile, and establish His Church.

Ultimately, I think Jesus' expectation was to draw all people to Himself, as He promised He would, and as He did when He embraced us all at the moment of His death on the cross. Yes, the Lord had the expectation that His Gospel would be welcomed by all.

The way He began His ministry shows this. After His temptations in the wilderness, Jesus went to His hometown of Nazareth. There, as recounted in Luke, He read from the Book of Isaiah, which describes the work of the Messiah:

“¹⁸ The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. ²⁰ Then the Lord Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'”

The Lord Jesus had the expectation of drawing all people to Himself, starting with those closest to Him—His neighbors and friends, the people He had known for most of His life and who were already dear to His heart. Unfortunately, as we know, the day ended tragically for Jesus in Nazareth. He was rejected and driven out of His hometown by His own friends and neighbors.

There is another story, in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus expresses His desire to draw people to Himself. One day, as He approached the city of Jerusalem and looked at it from a distance, He said:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

We all know what happened after the Lord Jesus said this.

Jesus himself knew that people were going to reject him, but that didn't stop him from hoping for or expecting a different outcome. This was true not only in Jerusalem but also in the other places he visited throughout his ministry.

Nazareth and Jerusalem were not the only places where the Lord was rejected, unwelcome, and forced to leave. There were other towns and places where the same thing happened to him. Yet, this did not stop him from continuing his work or from believing in us.

Dennis Wholey, host of the popular PBS-TV series *Late Night America*, once said: "Expecting the world to treat you fairly because you are a good person is a little like expecting the bull not to attack you because you are a vegetarian."

Sometimes, the world can be a hostile place. What is even more concerning is that we ourselves can easily contribute to making it more hostile. I pray that I, and those I know, will never be part of that destructive force, but instead, engage in the work that our Lord Jesus did and taught us after his baptism.

When we are mistreated or when things don't go our way, it can be easy to lose faith, to become discouraged, or—worse—turn against others or even against our own. But it is at those times that we must remember we too are baptized, and that there is still much work of love to be done in this world.

Let us remember the promises made at our baptism, where we pledged to proclaim Christ through word and deed, to care for others and for the world God created, and to work for justice and peace.

Even in times of deep social, economic, and political division and uncertainty, we must find ways to continue being kind to one another, to speak words of encouragement, and to care for and pray for one another. The One who has paid all our debts in full counts on us to do so. Why? Because we are baptized. **Amen.**

