

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jan 12th 2020

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

“He came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened for him.” (Matthew 3:16)

Isaiah tried to prepare the people. The Messiah will surprise us. He will not vanquish his enemies, garbed as a king or warrior or sage. The holy one comes as a servant, ministering quietly to the forgotten. We imagined a conqueror trampling over the earth, not a friend to broken creatures.

Old expectations are stubborn. They do not surrender easily. Surely salvation is earned. Don't we compete for God like we compete for all goods? Isn't more and more the goal? Only freeloaders get a pass. Doesn't God grade our achievements to divvy up glory?

When we pause from the race, these questions arise. Who finds us in the ditch? Who doesn't restrict entry? Who embraces the lowly and troublesome? Who throws a party when the lost one is found? Who does not await inspections to deem us worthy? In the pause, our eyes widen. We look for greatness in the wrong places. Glimpsing the face of God, we pass from death to life.

John was uncomfortable. By the river was Jesus, feet sunk in the mud like the throng awaiting the waters. John was just a messenger. To baptize the holy one was not proper, not just. Jesus reassured him: treat me the same. He came to share in our humanity. He came to serve sinners, not to rule from above.

Jesus emerged joyous from the water to the divine chorus. In accepting our humanity, we find God's embrace. “Here is my beloved. I am well pleased.”

Jeanne Schuler - Creighton University's Philosophy Department