

The Baptism of the Lord

Year A, 2026

Is 42:1-4, 6-7

Acts 10:34-38

Ps 29

Mt 2:3:13-17

Behold, obey, consume: the theophanic command

The Christmas season ends with the Church contemplating the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. More than a singular event in the life of Jesus, his baptism is a mystery, something to be contemplated in silent prayer and reflection, something to be wondered at with awe and admiration. Those who can stand before the mystery, or better yet, humbly kneel before it, taking it all in, will be rewarded amply. Such contemplation leads to wonder, and, as we reflected on last week, wonder leads to wisdom. I want to connect the baptism of Jesus with two other events in the life of the Lord so that we can wonder in contemplation at how God manifests himself to the world.

The baptism of Jesus in the Jordan is clearly a manifestation of God, something called a *theophany*. Jesus, coming up from the waters of the Jordan after his baptism, sees “*the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon him,*” and then “*a voice came from the heavens*” testifying to his identity: “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*” The theophany is complete: the person of the Son, the Spirit of God, the voice of the Father. Thus the Trinity is revealed, and God shows himself – a theophany. In the Baptism of the Lord, we are taught to behold him. This the first theophanic command.

The words spoken by the Father’s voice from heaven should have a very familiar ring to them, as we hear them again, later in the life of Jesus, at his Transfiguration (Mt 17). In that event, Jesus took Peter,

James, and John up a high mountain, where he is transfigured before them; *"his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light."* Then *"a bright cloud"* overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice spoke, saying: *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him."* Again, the theophany is complete: the person of the Son, transfigured in light, the numinous cloud representing the Holy Spirit, the voice of the Father. Thus the Trinity is revealed, and God shows himself – a theophany. In the Transfiguration of the Lord, we are taught to obey him. This is the second theophanic command.

Later in the gospel, Jesus is in the upper room with his disciples, where he takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to his disciples saying, *"Take and eat; this is my body."* For two millennia the Church has been obedient to the Lord Jesus to *"do this in memory of [him]"* (Lk 22:19). As the bread and wine are transformed into the holy Eucharist, the eucharistic liturgy itself becomes theophanic, revealing the triune Godhead. The Eucharistic prayer is addressed to the Father and offered to him; the Holy Spirit is called down upon the gifts to consecrate them and change them; the Son is revealed as he becomes present, though hidden, as it were, under the appearance of bread and wine. Thus the Trinity is revealed, and God shows himself – a theophany. In the Eucharist, in celebration of the Lord's Supper, we are taught to consume him. This is the third theophanic command.

Behold him. Obey him. Consume him. In these three brief command, do we not witness the attitude that Jesus had toward his own Father? Behold him. Jesus alone has seen the Father, and all during his

earthly life he longed to see the Father again, to return to him: *"No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father"* (Jn 6:46).

Obey him. Jesus reminded his disciples of the teaching of Moses that *"it is not by bread alone that [we] live, but by all that comes forth from the mouth of God"* (Dt 8:3). In John's gospel, Jesus speaks about his own obedience to the Father: *"I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me"* (Jn 6:38).

Consume him. Finally, just as Jesus commanded his disciples to consume his body and blood in the Eucharist, so was Jesus consumed by zeal for his Father's house (Jn 2:17).

In the Baptism of the Lord: behold him. In the Transfiguration of the Lord: obey him. In the Supper of the Lord: consume him. A trinity of theophanies; the theophany of the Trinity.

In our prayer, which should always be grounded in the Word of God, we can distill these scriptural episodes into very brief phrases that can be repeated over and over again, wherever we are, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. *"Speak to me Lord; give me a word,"* we might pray. And comes the response, *"Behold him. Obey him. Consume him."* This becomes my prayer, the Father speaking to me about the Son in the Holy Spirit: *"Behold him. Obey him. Consume him."*

I pray this over and over again during the day. When I first wake in the morning. In traffic. *"Behold him. Obey him. Consume him."*

While running errands or doing chores. On my breaks and while I wait. Before and after meetings. “Behold him. Obey him. Consume him.” While fixing dinner and tidying up in the evening. Hundreds of times I repeat these theophanic commands – “Behold him. Obey him. Consume him.” – and I know that God is speaking to me, that his Word is alive to me.

But then I want to speak to God, so I ask God, using his own words to express the desire of my heart, and I make bold to say and pray: “Lord, behold me; hear me; consume me.”

“Behold me; hear me; consume me.” This becomes my prayer to God, and I repeat it over and over again. It becomes a litany, a recitation of a holy and pleasing desire before the splendor and power of the one holy, mighty, and immortal God. “Behold me; hear me; consume me.”

And I learn that beholding God, I am beheld. Obeying God, I am heard. Consuming God, I am consumed.

This is what the scriptures teach us by the Lord’s Baptism, by his Transfiguration, and in his gift of the holy Eucharist. We are given a new way to pray as in wonder we ponder the mystery of God revealing himself to us, his glorious and awesome theophany.

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:9). And the Lord says: “Behold him. Obey him. Consume him.”