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Columnists

Christ's divine kingship of suffering

By Father Albert Shamon

Sunday readings: (R3) Mark 1:7-11; (R1) Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; (R2) Acts 10:34-38.

It sounds strange to modern Christian ears to say that Jesus was baptized. There is a popular emphasis in traditional catechetics which, for us, connects baptism with forgiveness of sin. But we all know that Jesus was not a sinner. So why was He baptized? Was He playing some kind of game?

Jesus' baptism was a proclamation, a revelation and an inauguration.

It was a proclamation, since at baptism the voice from heaven told who Christ is: "This is my beloved Son." This expression echoed Psalm 2:7, where the Messiah is spoken of as a divine king. "The Lord said to my Lord, 'You are my Son; this day I have begotten you.'"

Jesus' baptism was a revelation, for at His baptism the Spirit of God descended on Him like a dove, and the voice from heaven went on to say: "My favor rests on Him."

These words and actions reflect the words of the prophet Isaiah in the first reading. The prophet speaks of God's servant as being a man who suffers. By using these words of the prophet at the baptism of Jesus, Mark is telling us that Jesus is this servant, and that His kingship, divine though it be, will not be one of earthly triumph, but rather one of suffering. The Spirit was given Him to fulfill this difficult role.

Finally, the baptism of Jesus was an inauguration. It was a formal beginning of His work of salvation. By submitting to John's baptism, He identified Himself with sinners and was ready to suffer the consequences. The temptations that immediately followed His baptism demonstrated how fiercely beset with struggle His life would henceforth become, and they also presaged His ultimate victory and His

A Word for Sunday

unflinching obedience to His Father's will, even when it meant the cross.

Jesus' baptism teaches us what our baptism is. It, too, is a proclamation that we are sons of God. It also is a revelation that our purpose in life must be the very same as that of the Son of God Himself. In other words, we must live like the Son of God. Jesus' whole life was lived for others — to save others no matter what the cost to Himself. Lest we think this is too hard, the Spirit of God is given to us. How beautifully Isaiah put it: "I, the Lord, have called you . . . I have grasped you by the hand . . . I have formed you . . ."

In a word, all this is His doing, not ours. Our doing is to let what He has begun be done. He has made us a light to the nations. Our job is to let the light shine, to let others see our goodness.

This calls for an inauguration, a striving to be:

meek — that is, not crying out, not shouting at others;

understanding — that is, not breaking the bruised reed or quenching the smoldering wick, kicking people when they are down;

broadminded — that is, showing no partiality, seeing people as persons and not as things.

Then one day God will be able to say to each of us: "You are my beloved son."

King Herod commits a cruel crime

By Cindy Bassett

"Claudius, where are you? Come here at once!" King Herod cried. When someone finally appeared in the palace throne room in response, it was not Claudius; but another servant.

"And where is Claudius?" King Herod snapped impatiently.

"I am not certain, your majesty," the servant replied. "He left here several days ago, at your request, following those three kings. It seem that is the last time anyone has seen Claudius."

"Ungrateful man," King Herod muttered half to himself as he turned to the window. "Will there be anything else?" the servant ventured timidly.

"Yes. I have an idea since it appears I have been tricked by those kings," he answered. "Call in my astrologers."

A short time later, the best astrologers in all of the kingdom had been assembled in the throne room. They waited patiently for King Herod's explanation.

"I have but one question," the king said. "This star that suddenly appeared in the sky — when was the first time it was actually seen?"

"From our calculations, your majesty, that would be two years ago," one of the astrologers replied.

"Fine. That is all I needed to know," King Herod said, and hastily dismissed them.

It wasn't long before the servant realized the magnitude of King Herod's cruelty. The king sent his soldiers on a deadly mission to Bethlehem. Their orders were: "Kill all the baby boys two years of age and under. Spare no one in all of the district!"

Even as King Herod's soldiers were making their way toward Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary remained there with Jesus. But God had another plan for them.

"Joseph," Mary called softly as she rocked the baby in her arms. "Why so troubled today?"

"I know how much you have been looking forward to going back to our families, but it

seems this is not to be," he replied.

"Not return home?" Mary asked, her eyes filling with tears. "I want everyone to see Jesus, and I'm so homesick!"

"I know, Mary," Joseph said gently. "But I've had another dream. Through the dream, God told me that King Herod intends to kill Jesus. He will stop at nothing!"

"So where are we to go?" Mary asked.

"To Egypt," Joseph answered. "But only for a short time. When it is safe, I promise we shall return home."

Mary continued to rock the tiny baby, then glanced back at Joseph. She loved her family. It would be unbearable if anything happened. Her mind was made up. "We have always trusted God before to guide us," she said. "When shall we leave?"

"As soon as it is night," Joseph advised. "We will travel under the protecting cover of darkness."

By the following day, Joseph, Mary and Jesus were heading south through the desert toward Egypt. Herod's purposes had been thwarted, but not before many other innocents died. When Herod's soldiers had finished, not one baby in all of Bethlehem had been spared. A great cry of anguish and mourning went on for many days.

Joseph and Mary did not return home to Nazareth until King Herod died nearly two years later. Today Herod is remembered as a cruel dictator who had one of his wives and two of his sons executed because he felt threatened by them. The nameless babies who died because of King Herod are remembered in late December on the Feast of the Holy Innocents. Scripture reference: Matthew 2:13-23.

Leadership prayer breakfast set for Holiday Inn in Rochester

Hundreds of pastors and church leaders from the Greater Rochester area will come together at the Holiday Inn, 1111 Jefferson Road, Rochester on Saturday, Jan. 9, at 7:45 a.m. to pray and learn how to become involved in the upcoming Greater Rochester Billy Graham Crusade.

The guest speaker for the program will be Bishop William C. Frey of the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado.

For six years, Bishop Frey has served as

chairman of the Episcopal Church's Commission on Peace. In 1985, he was one of four nominees for the office of presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church. Most recently, Bishop Frey has served as a member of the invitation, executive and administrative committees of the July, 1987, Rocky Mountain Billy Graham Crusade, which was held in Denver, Colorado. For information on the crusade, call (716) 427-8025.

Words

By Nearly 20 newly ordained

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