

Part III:

The Humility of Christ

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also. If any one serves me, the Father will honor him.

John 12:23-26 RSV (Fifth Sunday in Lent, *Revised Common Lectionary*, Year B)

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 5:7-10 NRSV (Fifth Sunday in Lent, *Revised Common Lectionary*, Year B)

Theophany

Jesus' New Relationship with the Spirit, and Ours

The Beginning?!

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God ... John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness” (Mark 1:1-4). After our lengthy examinations of the expectation, conception, birth, natures, and person of Jesus, it is hard to believe that Mark “begins” the gospel of Jesus when Jesus’ life is practically over! No angelic appearances? No Christmas carols? No family tours of Egypt or Jerusalem? You call *this* a gospel?

Mark not only calls it a gospel, he launched the entire literary genre. Indeed, the first gospel writer’s style managed to provoke two, and possibly three, more canonical stories of Jesus’ life.¹ He started this frenzy of biographies not only with uneven syntax and problematic claims (“he could do no mighty work there,” Mark 6:5), but with a compelling narrative whose subtlety and power have made it perhaps the most popular gospel among twentieth century critical readers.

With the apocalyptic intensity of an action movie, the gospel rushes us into its first scene, and it is a shocker. The Baptist appears, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judea and Jerusalem streams out to respond to John’s altar call, turning their lives around, back toward the way of the Lord. And there we meet the Son of God – *repenting with the rest*.

¹ See Telford Work, “Synoptic Star Wars,” *Books & Culture* 8:2 (March/April 2002), 6-7.

Starting one's life over at an altar call is, to put it mildly, an unlikely context for Mark to introduce his readers to one the Church is already calling sinless (2 Cor. 5:21)! What is going on? Why start here? In fact, why mention something this awkward at all?

The Problem of Jesus' Baptism

Many biblical critics think they know the answer. Jesus' baptism is prominent in every gospel because it is too embarrassing to ignore. Critics of the "Nazarenes," as the Jesus movement was once called, could point to many moments of Jesus' life that contradicted the Church's claims about him. He died the shameful death of an unsuccessful political criminal. He broke the law of Moses.² And he began as a disciple of John the Baptist, whose initiation rite was a public display of repentance. To survive these criticisms, they say, the Church had to narrate these details of Jesus' life in a more positive light. And so the gospel writers (and probably those they drew on for their material) spin like crazy by putting words in John's mouth: "I am not worthy to stoop down and untie his sandals" (Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:7, Luke 3:16). "John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me'" (Matthew 3:14). "His winnowing fork is in his hand" (Luke 3:17). "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me'" (John 1:29-30, Second Sunday after Epiphany, Year A).

What then is the significance of Jesus' baptism, once it is massaged into the gospel contexts? Adoptionists thought they knew the answer. Mark begins with Jesus' baptism because Jesus' divinity begins with his baptism. Before this turning point, Jesus lives a quiet, even

Besides the direct literary dependence of Matthew and Luke upon Mark, Richard Bauckham argues impressively that John is an intertextual project that assumes readers' familiarity with Mark's gospel. See "John for Readers of Mark," in Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 147-171. If Mark had done Luke's more professional job, we might only have one biography of Jesus (and what would the Jesus Seminar do then?).

unexceptional life. We only hear of one noteworthy event between his infancy and his baptism: An anecdote of his fondness for hearing the Word in his father's house (Luke 2:41-51). But once baptized, Jesus is on fire. He gathers disciples, prophesies powerfully, exorcises and heals. Surely, they reasoned, it is at his baptism that Jesus becomes the Son of God: "You are my son: *Today* I have begotten you" (Ps. 2:7, cf. Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22).³

All four gospels capture the transformation. In Luke, Jesus returns home "in the power of the Spirit," goes to his synagogue, and lets his congregation in on the fact that he is fulfilling Isaiah 61:1-2 as he speaks. Transfixed, they gasp: "Isn't this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:14-22). It takes only one further remark (4:23-27) for his city to banish and nearly kill him (4:28-29).

In Matthew, the scene comes after one of Jesus' teaching sessions. His disciples, who don't know what he used to be like, accept his authority (Matt. 13:51-52). But in his own country, in his own synagogue, the reaction is skeptical: "'Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?' And they took offense at him" (Matt. 13:53-57). Nazareth rejects Jesus because he is a known quantity, not an unknown one. How could a homeboy who built your porch be the Messiah?

Mark, as usual, goes to extremes. There, as we have seen, Jesus' very own family is hardened: "He is beside himself." "He has an unclean spirit." It is his own kin who commit the unforgivable sin (Mark 3:21-30)! Jesus' new family, his real family, is the family of the Spirit who anointed him (Mark 3:31-35).

² Christians respond that Jesus broke the law *as interpreted*, not as written; but as those who have faced IRS audits know, this is still to break the law.

In John, the scene is Capernaum, the occasion is the feeding of the multitude, and the antagonists are family acquaintances. To Jesus' claim that he is bread from heaven, they reply, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'" (John 6:41-42). These are not people whose prior knowledge of Jesus has prepared them for what they now see. Indeed, they reject the one transformed *on account of* his transformation.

The first apostolic preaching acknowledges a great transformation in the Jordan. "You know ... the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed (*echrisen*, "christened") Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:36-38, Sunday after Epiphany, Year A). It seems to be one short step from this to the Adoptionist case: Until being anointed, Jesus is simply *not* Lord, not Son, not God. At his baptism, God is with him quite literally, in the Holy Spirit, from which he gains the power to save.

Mark's canonical handlers (Matthew, Luke, and John) preface the baptismal scene with new beginnings of their own. Their work was so persuasive that the Christian year, following Luke, remembers Jesus' baptism only after Advent, Christmas, and Christmastime have "prepared the way for the Lord." But the Adoptionist explanation for the change in the baptismal Jesus still so threatened the faith that orthodox churches have drawn back even from making claims as bold as those in the gospels and Acts. The Christian year has found Jesus' baptism too important to ignore, but too hot to handle. While Jesus' baptism is prominent in the Feast of the

³ Other schools of pre- and post-Chalcedonian adoptionism held Jesus' acquisition of divinity to have happened at different times. Ralph del Colle offers a summary of pre-Chalcedonian Spirit-Christologies in *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* (New York: Oxford, 1994), 157-160.

Theophany (Jan. 6), and gaining ground over the visit of the Magi as the occasion for Epiphany (also Jan. 6), it is so firmly subordinated to incarnation that Jesus' baptism becomes *merely* a proclamatory event, merely a revelation of what has long been the case. As a Russian Orthodox catechism puts it, "It is at this point that the first disciples believed in him and recognized in him the long-awaited Christ. Not that he became Messiah precisely on this day (as certain heretics have claimed), for the Son is Christ for all eternity. He does not *become* Christ, for the Holy Spirit always rests with him. ... It is on the day of his baptism, however, that this eternal reality is manifested to mankind."⁴ Thus the Catholic and Anglican feast of Epiphany ("manifestation") and the Orthodox feast of Theophany ("appearance of God"), celebrating an appearance of the Triune God, and nothing more.

Is that true to the canonical picture? Acts 10:36-38, which the catechism draws on for support, makes the newness of the post-baptismal Jesus so explicit that it is hard to see how the catechism can deny it.⁵ Following baptism's gift of pneumatic power (Matt. 3:16, First Sunday after Epiphany, Year A; Mark 1:10, Year B; Luke 3:22, Year C; John 1:32-34, Second Sunday after Epiphany, Year A), Jesus embarks upon a Spirit-empowered ministry (Matt. 4:1, 12:28; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1, 4:14, 4:18, Acts 1,2, 2:33; John 3:34, 16:13-15). Mark and Luke emphasize that this pneumatic anointing, this "manifestation of divinity," is precisely what Jesus' family and people cannot accept about him. Something *is* new about Jesus after his baptism, something so important to Christology that Peter's sermon in Cornelius' house ties the baptism of Jesus directly into his ministry of salvation of the whole world (Acts 10:42, Sunday after Epiphany,

⁴ Olga Dunlop, trans., *The Living God: A Catechism* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1989), 1.56.

⁵ I find it astounding that Ignace de la Potterie, whose account of Jesus' baptism rightly locates the Jordan, and not Jesus' conception, as the occasion of his anointing, still denies a connection in the New Testament between the title "Christ" and the theology of anointing. See Ignace de la Potterie, "The Anointing of Christ", in Leo J. O'Donovan, ed., *Word and Mystery: Biblical Essays on the Person and Mission of Christ* (New York: Newman, 1968), 155-184, reviewed in del Colle, 137-138n.84.

Year A). It is with Peter's words about Jesus' watery anointing that the Holy Spirit falls on the Gentile believers (10:44-46), and they too are baptized (10:47-48), setting off a controversy that will revolutionize the Church (11:1-35).⁶ In the apostolic preaching, the newness of Jesus' baptism is made newness for the whole world.

The Fall and Rise of Spirit-Christology

As Jesus' annunciation and birth are focal points for incarnational Christology, so Jesus' baptism is the focal point of another fully biblical approach to Christology: *Spirit-Christology*, a movement that claims, in the words of Ralph del Colle, that "the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit is as important to conveying the truth of the christological mystery with its soteriological consequences as that of Jesus and the Word. The latter without the former leads to a truncated christology and ... one that is seriously lacking in trinitarian perspective."⁷

Here especially Chalcedon fails to guide us, not because it is wrong, but because it is silent – on the role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' career. Both Eastern and Western theology have so concentrated on Jesus the Word made flesh that the Holy Spirit's relationship to Jesus has suffered neglect. The Church has become so fixed on incarnation that it can no longer hear what the Bible says about Jesus *the Spirit-Anointed*, Jesus *the Messiah*, Jesus *Christ*. Its teaching on Jesus often minimizes, and sometimes eliminates, the Holy Spirit's role between Annunciation and Pentecost. The problem is as widespread as it is early. The prominence of Jesus' baptism in the apostolic preaching of acts is matched by its invisibility in the creeds of the early and later Church, which leap from Jesus' birth to his passion. Christmas swallows Epiphany; Chalcedon

⁶ For more on this revolution, see Lois Malcolm, "???", and Telford Work, "Speaking for the Spirit in the Time of Division," presented to the Ecclesiology Study Group of the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, February 2001.

⁷ Ralph del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit* (New York: Oxford, 1994), 4.

crowds out Spirit-Christology. Indeed, “orthodox Trinitarianism is in part the result of the gradual displacement of Spirit-christology by Logos-christology in the ancient church.”⁸

Writers from the eve of the Chalcedonian era illustrate the tendency. In fighting the Nestorian predication of “Christ” only to Jesus’ human “person,” Cyril (along with the Fathers generally) *equates* anointing with incarnation: “The title Christ, and that which it signifies (that is, an anointing) ... signifies wonderfully well that he has been anointed in being made man.”⁹ Even David Coffey’s Spirit-Christology holds to the conception as the occasion for the Spirit’s anointing.¹⁰ The Russian Orthodox catechism, uncomfortable even with this claim, pushes back the Father’s anointing into eternity.¹¹

Both of these moves make Jesus’ baptismal transformation inexplicable – even the embarrassment that some critics think it is. They might honor the figural sense of Luke 2:11, “to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” But they cannot honor the literal sense of Luke 4:18, Jesus’ inaugural sermon, which has so obviously followed up on Jesus’ Spirit-baptism: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.”

Among the casualties of reducing anointing to incarnation is the Church’s own relationship to the Holy Spirit, which Luke-Acts links to Jesus’ baptismal relationship. The Spirit-indwelt Church is reduced to the “body of Christ” (meaning only the body of the Son).¹² The believer is charged to be an imitator of Christ (meaning only the Son), without mention of

⁸ Del Colle, 92.

⁹ Cyril, 66.

¹⁰ “In the anointing theology of Coffey, the Father anoints Jesus with the Holy Spirit to divine sonship, this being identical with the incarnation.” David Coffey, *Grace: The Gift of the Holy Spirit* (Sydney: Catholic Institute of Sydney, 1979), 120, 127, 130, cited in del Colle, 124. Our criticism here is not that the Spirit is not the agent of the Son’s incarnation, but that the anointing at the Jordan is not *identical with*, nor merely a manifestation of, incarnation.

¹¹ Aslanoff, 1.164-165

the companionship of the indwelling Paraclete who makes this possible.¹³ Worse, the Spirit is cut free from the Son, and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit becomes a modalistic license for “charismatic chaos.”

For decades Western theologians have sensed these weaknesses in the doctrines of Trinity and incarnation. But Adoptionism’s legacy has left many worried that Spirit-Christology is necessarily a dichotomous alternative to incarnational (or “Word”) Christology, and a heretical one at that. Spirit-Christologies that either *substitute* or *identify* Word with Spirit as the element of divinity in Jesus do nothing to dispel the worry.¹⁴

More recently, theologians such as Joseph H.P. Wong, Philip Rosato, Yves Congar, Walter Kasper, and Ralph del Colle¹⁵ have persuasively argued that each method says too little by itself, and thus that they are not only potentially compatible, but actually necessary to each other’s health. The difference between the Son’s and the Spirit’s relationships with the Father distinguishes the Son’s incarnate union with holy humanity from the Spirit’s inhabitation of it.¹⁶ The ground for such a harmony of filial and spiritual missions is solid: Colin Brown finds each of the gospel writers developing both a Word- and a Spirit-Christology. The main difference between them is that the synoptics begin with Spirit-Christology, John with Word Christology.¹⁷

¹² Cf. del Colle, 11. The term is susceptible to a pneumatological as well as Christological interpretation, both in its classical formulation and especially as it is developed in recent Catholic theology (49-56).

¹³ Cf. del Colle, 9.

¹⁴ Among several examples del Colle offers is James D.G. Dunn’s account of New Testament Christology (see del Colle, 141-147) and Piet Schoonenberg (148-156, 217-219). However, this and other movements within the common umbrella of “Spirit-Christology” do not cause del Colle to disown the label for his own Trinitarian account (del Colle 7n.1), “one that preserves the integrity of hypostatic differentiation within the Trinity” (92). Quite rightly – after all, there are many defective *incarnational* Christologies.

¹⁵ Del Colle (7) cites Wong as representative of the others: “By a ‘Spirit-orientated Christology’ I do not intend a Spirit Christology I place of Logos Christology.” See Joseph H.P. Wong, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner* (Rome: Las, 1984), as well as Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 vols. (New York: Seabury, 1983), Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (New York: Paulist, 1976), Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), and Bruno Forte, *The Trinity as History* (New York: Alba House, 1989).

¹⁶ Del Colle, 111-112, on the Spirit-Christology of David Coffey, which develops the work of Karl Rahner’s *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

¹⁷ Colin Brown, *That You May Believe: Miracles and Faith Then and Now* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 144.

Del Colle lists several considerations in integrating Word-Christology and Spirit-Christology. First, the missions of the Son and Spirit are intimately intertwined, but distinct. This is as true at Annunciation as it is at Pentecost, and every point in-between. The Spirit's work in incarnation is to empower Jesus. The Son's work after his ascension continues through the Spirit. The New Testament does not show us two divine beings, each doing his own thing, but two persons sent by the Father to accomplish the Father's one will in one economy of salvation. Second, the two missions of Son and Spirit are both simultaneous and sequential. Both persons are working (with the Father) at the same time. Yet as the focus shifts at Annunciation, and again at Pentecost, the Church has rightly sensed that time between these two events is more an "Age of the Son" and the time afterward an "Age of the Spirit."¹⁸ Third, the relationship between Jesus and Spirit witnessed in the biblical economy resembles the inner relationship among them in the life of the immanent Trinity. The Son and Spirit do not act one way "in themselves" and another way in history.¹⁹

These considerations give us solid methodological ground from which to view the imagery of the baptismal scene, Spirit-Christology's focal point, as we reintegrate incarnational Christology and Spirit-Christology. Or, rather, we find that the imagery of the baptismal scene as remembered in the Christian year gives us solid methodological ground to appreciate Spirit-Christology's contributions to formal Christology.

The Perfect Penitent

This brings us back to the supposed "embarrassment" of Jesus' baptism. Of all the gospel writers, it is Luke, not Mark, who makes the most of Jesus' baptism, so we will concentrate on

¹⁸ In other words, to join a debate within American evangelicalism, both "covenant theologians" and "dispensationalists" are broadly correct, at least in what they *affirm*. Their problems stem more from what each denies.

¹⁹ Del Colle, 27-28.

Luke's account. There we find not that Luke hides Jesus' baptism safely behind the front lines of Jesus' birth, but that Luke's birth narratives emphasize the Baptist in a whole new way. It is not Mary who leads Luke's gospel, but John's parents. Zechariah his doing his priestly duty when an angel delivers the terrifying good news:

Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ... He will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared (Luke 1:13-17).

John's relationship to Elijah comes up again in Zechariah's blessing at John's circumcision: "You, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:76-77). The blessing echoes Malachi 3:1: "Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, *and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple*; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts." Malachi's last words, already echoed in 1:17, close the connection: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse" (4:5-6). The connection here, as in Matthew and Mark, certainly cements Jesus' arrival as the Lord's coming to his temple to refine God's chosen people, as Brown claims.²⁰ But this interpretation by itself makes Jesus' baptism incidental to his subsequent ministry. John could simply have pointed to Jesus and gone his own way. Is there more, at least in Luke's account?

²⁰ Brown, 114.

Luke sees the Baptist as reenacting the central event in Elijah's ministry: the showdown on Mt. Carmel.²¹ The literary clues are allusive, but too numerous to be coincidental:²²

When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" He answered, "I have not troubled Israel; but you have, and your father's house, because you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. Now therefore have all Israel assemble for me at Mount Carmel, with the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table (1 Kings 18:17-19).

Elijah then came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." The people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets number four hundred fifty" (1 Kings 18:12-22).

"The god who answers by fire is indeed God" (1 Kings 18:24).

The water ran all around the altar, and filled the trench also with water (1 Kings 18:35).

"Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back" (1 Kings 18:37).

Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench (1 Kings 18:38).

When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD indeed is God; the LORD indeed is God" (1 Kings 18:39).

He preached good news to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, shut up John in prison (Luke 3:18-20).

He went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ... He said therefore to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (Luke 3:3, 7).

"He will baptize with Holy Spirit and with fire" (Luke 3:16).

"I baptize you with water" (Luke 3:16).

"He will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just" (Luke 1:16-17).

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21-22).

"He will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God" (Luke 1:16). "All flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Isaiah 40:5 in Luke 3:21-22).

²¹ The Orthodox catechism notes the connection, but leaves it relatively undeveloped (Aslanoff 1.162).

²² There are other links between Luke's setting and Ahab's struggle with Elijah, for example: 1 Kings 17 in Luke 7:11-35, and (less directly) 1 Kings 18:17 in Luke 23:2, 1 Kings 18:44ff in Luke 12:54-56, 1 Kings 19:20-21 in Luke 9:61-62, and 1 Kings 22:19 in Luke 2:13.

John has been preparing Israel for its restoration with a baptism of repentance. Many of Jacob's children have responded to this invitation, newly submitting themselves to God. These acknowledge the justice of God, unlike the Pharisees and lawyers who, like the prophets of Baal, reject God's purpose for them (Luke 7:29-30).

Then, along comes the Son of the Most High, conceived by the Holy Spirit, who, astoundingly, humbles and offers *himself*. His self-offering, like no other, God finds to be an acceptable sacrifice, and his act is met with the fire of YHWH. This fire, taking bodily shape, like a dove, descends from heaven upon Jesus, providing the might of his mighty ministry (Luke 3:16). Here too, and in a new way, the Lord comes to his temple.

C.S. Lewis envisions Jesus as "the perfect penitent," the God-man who alone could repent perfectly and receive God's acceptance. "He could surrender His will, and suffer and die, because He was man; and He could do it perfectly because He was God."²³ Lewis' atonement theory has come in for some criticism, but only because it respects the problems Jesus' baptism already poses for orthodox Christology: Of what does a sinless Jesus have to repent?

The answer is this: the sins of his people. Jesus is a *representative* sacrifice, like the bull at Carmel. The sacrifice, and its heavenly response, is a beginning of Jesus' ultimate self-sacrifice on the cross, and the Father's acceptance of it as ransom for our own deaths. The prophet sees the same innocence at Jesus' inauguration (Luke 3:16) that the centurion sees at his execution (Luke 23:47). Jesus' water- and Spirit-baptism at the Jordan is the *Vorklang* of his blood-baptism at Golgotha (Luke 12:50). To change metaphors, Jesus' baptism is not an embarrassment to his ministry; it is an overture. The two events begin and end the long sacrificial crescendo that is Jesus' ministry. Lewis is right: Jesus is the perfect penitent. Many

²³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, rev. ed. (New York: Collier, 1952), 59-60.

icons of Jesus' baptism portray the Son with an impassive, even bored expression, as if he already knows what others are suddenly discovering. That is fair enough to the Johannine account, in which John is *not* Elijah (John 1:21). But a portrayal fairer to Luke's vision is Bartolomé Murillo's "Baptism of Christ," in which Jesus bows, arms crossed in a gesture of humility, before John's authority as "more than a prophet." The baptized Jesus is the icon of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, for we find our forgiveness in his death and our hope in his life (Rom. 5:6-11, cf. Rom. 6:3-4).

Without Luke's prior emphasis on Jesus' lordship at birth, Jesus' baptism *would* be susceptible to an adoptionist interpretation. But with it, the baptism is a divine empowering of the one divinely conceived.²⁴ Now anointed and filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus is the Messiah (*messiach, christos*, "anointed one") ready to face and overcome the devil's temptations (Isa. 61:1-4, Sunday after Epiphany, Year C, *New Common Lectionary*).²⁵ Now declared Son by the Father himself, Jesus is the new Adam ("the son of God," Luke 3:38), ready to show humanity what it really is to image God. With Jesus now indwelt by the Spirit, the Spirit now draws people to Jesus, and Jesus can impart his Spirit to his own people at Pentecost after they are baptized in his name (Acts 2:38).

A question remains, for the crowd and perhaps for Jesus himself: What *kind* of Messiah is Jesus? To what effect is his anointing? We, and perhaps he, will find out in the wilderness (4:1-13; see Lent, below).

Theophany: Baptism as Window on the Trinity

²⁴ Thus, for Coffey, "the revelation of the office of 'Christ' to which the anointing at Jordan attests does bespeak the inner constitution of the hypostatic union" (del Colle, 122).

²⁵ Brown, 121.

Furthermore, in manifesting his holy fire, God reveals himself, not only as the fire's source, but also as the fire's destination – Jesus – and in the fire itself, which is the Holy Spirit. It is here – not in clover, ice-water, three-layer cakes, eggs, streams, the sun, or even Augustinian minds and Cappadocian turned-in mirrors – that the Trinity is imaged clearly. “The voice of YHWH upon the waters ... the voice of YHWH flashes forth flames of fire” (Ps. 29:3, 7, Sunday after Epiphany, Years A, B, and C). The Holy Spirit is the fire of God. He proceeds from the Father, conceives the Son, rests upon him, authors the new creation, empowers his work, and continues it in his absence through the body of Christ, which is the Church. The Son is God's righteousness, God's gift (Rom. 8:32) to fulfill humanity's appointed purpose. Through him all things are made (Gen. 1:1-5, Sunday after Epiphany, Year B), and made new. He receives, mediates, and sends along the Spirit in obedience to the will of the Father. The Father is God who guides the Son and the Spirit, sends them, accepts them, and receives them. The Son and the Spirit do the will and work of the maker of all things, visible and invisible. Jesus' baptism, says Del Colle, reveals “the Father who sends, Jesus who obeys (‘to fulfill all righteousness,’ Matt. 3:15), and the Spirit who leads and empowers (Lk. 4:1, 14).”²⁶

Bruno Forte contends that restricting ourselves to Word-Christology makes the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit appear to be one-way: From the Father to the Son to the Spirit.²⁷ The result can be subordination of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is “domesticated” and pneumatology becomes an extension of Christology. Properly framed along with Word-Christology, Spirit-Christology honors the “reciprocal relationship of interaction” between Son

²⁶ Del Colle, 166.

and Spirit that reflects a truly Trinitarian divine action in the world. The Spirit empowers Jesus; Jesus sends his Spirit. The two are truly Irenaeus' "two hands of God."²⁸

Imaged in the event of baptism are the relations of begetting and proceeding that constitute the Father, the Son, and the Spirit as who they are. Del Colle affirms a "correlation between the three divine hypostases and three distinct agents of God's salvific work. ... [T]he Father sends Jesus by both a speech-act ('You are my beloved Son,' Mk. 1:11) and a pneumatic anointing ('the Spirit descending on him like a dove,' Mk. 1:10)."²⁹ For vestiges of the Trinity, we should not go to the fridge, for we can go to the font. We may say that Jesus' baptism is more than an Epiphany or Theophany, but we can never claim it is less:

When you, O Lord, were baptized in the Jordan,
the worship of the Trinity was made manifest!
For the voice of the Father bore witness to you, and called you his beloved Son!
And the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the truthfulness of his word.
O Christ our God, you have revealed yourself and have enlightened the world,
glory to you!³⁰

Yet while Jesus' baptism may be one of the clearest theophanies, it cannot stand alone. In fact, everything in Jesus' career images the Trinity. If Jesus' baptism is an overture that introduces us to his entire subsequent career, then it teaches us to look at every moment in that career to see the Father, Son, and Spirit indivisibly working. Indeed, we only *know* Jesus' baptism is an overture after hearing its themes return throughout Jesus' career.

Growing in Favor with God: Jesus' New Relationship with the Holy Spirit

²⁷ Here Cappadocians point fingers at Augustinians for "subordinating the Spirit" through introducing the *Filioque* into the Western Nicene Creed, but it is worth pointing out that the Cappadocian pattern is already *a Patre ad Patrem*, moving from Father, through Son, in the Holy Spirit, back through the restoring work of Spirit and Son to the Father who is the goal of all things. The Eastern pattern too may be seen to run in one direction. Hence even after establishing the divinity of the Son, the Eastern tradition still faced denials of the Holy Spirit. See Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 25.

²⁸ Forte, 126.

²⁹ He explains that "the filiological relation is distinct from the pneumatological one" because "while there is a relationship between the Spirit and Jesus' status as the 'beloved Son,' the latter is not predicated on the pneumatic anointing but on the direct communication of the Father to the Son he anoints" (del Colle, 167).

Alexandria and Antioch took separate methodological paths, interacting mainly to take issue with each other. Appreciating the Chalcedonian compromise implicitly demands that *we* appreciate the insights of both. And then we face a problem that the purists of each school did not: How are Word- and Spirit-Christology to be reconciled? We seem to face a dilemma between Word-Christology and Adoptionism. If the pre-baptismal Jesus is already fully divine, is he not already filled with the Holy Spirit? If he is not filled with the Holy Spirit, how can he be fully divine before his baptism?

To rephrase the question: What was the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit before his baptism? After his baptism? With respect to his divinity, both answers are the same as they were, are, and will be forever: The Son is begotten by the Father before all worlds, etc. But with respect to his humanity, the answers are not. John's baptism changes Jesus' *human* relationships with the Father and the Holy Spirit.³¹

Alexandrians took great care to distinguish incarnation from inspiration. Two differences are crucial: First, in incarnation God *becomes* flesh, whereas in inspiration God comes *upon* or *into* a human being.³² Second, in incarnation it is *the Word* who becomes flesh, whereas in inspiration it is *the Holy Spirit* who comes upon a human being. So we can say that the pre-

³⁰ Troparion of Theophany, tone 4. Aslanoff, 1.151.

³¹ This is not the direction Spirit-Christology takes in the neo-Scholastic Catholic tradition, where Jesus' relationship with the Holy Spirit is understood in terms of the nature and means of the divine indwelling (del Colle, 79). But it is at home in the Reformed tradition. Commenting on Matthew 3:16, Calvin remarks, "in the fullness of time, to equip him for the fulfillment of the office of Redeemer, he is endowed with a new power of the Spirit.... He comes forth as a divine man, under the royal power of the Holy Spirit. We know that he is God, manifested in the flesh, but his heavenly power is also to be thought upon in his Person as a minister, in his human nature." Philip W. Butin characterizes Calvin as teaching "perichoretic empowerment of the Son by the Spirit," in *Revelation, Redemption, and Response: Calvin's Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship* (New York: Oxford, 1995), 65-66.

³² Athanasius insists that the Word "became man, he did not come into a man. It is essential to grasp this point, in case the impious should fall into thinking ... that it was just like the former occasions on which the Word 'came' into the various saints, and that now too he had come to reside in a man in the same way, sanctifying him and manifesting himself in him just as he had in the others. If this had been the case — if he had just appeared in a man — there would have been nothing extraordinary about him at all." *Against the Arians* 3.30, *NPNF* II.4, 410.

baptismal Jesus is the enfleshed Word, but not a human being filled with the Holy Spirit.

(Consider the angelic contrast between Jesus' cousin, who "will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" [Luke 1:15], and Jesus, who "will be called Holy, the Son of God" [Luke 1:35].)

Jesus' human relationships naturally change as his life unfolds. This is equally true of his human relationships with God: "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, *and in favor with God and humanity*" (Luke 2:52). The chapter divisions of Luke have obscured rather than clarified this extraordinary claim. That Luke 2:52 directly follows Jesus' childhood sojourn to Jerusalem is commonly appreciated. It is less often noted that it also directly precedes the account of Jesus' baptism, which begins in 3:1. The verse means not only to recap the childhood of Jesus, but also to lead the reader into a moment so transformative, even for Jesus, that it inaugurates Jesus' messianic career. Jesus' self-sacrifice and its acceptance fundamentally alter his human relationships with God and with his people. The Holy Spirit comes upon him after the way the Spirit came upon the Israelite prophets, priests, and kings whose careers he fulfills. He gains a new human relationship with the Holy Spirit, as one indwelt and empowered.³³ He gains a new human relationship with the Father, as a spokesman, an intercessor, and a ruler. He gains new human relationships with humanity, as the appointed representative of a restored Israel. God puts his Spirit upon his chosen servant to bring justice to the nations, giving spirit not only to that servant, but to all his covenant people (Isa. 42:1-9, Sunday after Epiphany, Year A).³⁴ The one

³³ Compare the argument of Maurice de la Taille, S.J., that, in del Colle's words, "there is a distinct and proper mission of the Holy Spirit in the doctrine of the *inhabitation* of the just person" (71, emphasis added). But here the *inhabitation* is a function of incarnation, not of baptism.

³⁴ See also Brown, 117.

chosen from before the foundation of the world is this day inaugurated to do the purpose God has set forth for him (Eph. 1:4-9). He gains not a new inner *being*, but a new *title*: Messiah.³⁵

The doctrine of the communication of attributes often obscures this transformation involved in Jesus' messianic inauguration, because the doctrine is commonly developed in less than an explicitly Trinitarian way. Treating incarnation as a union of generalized divine and human natures leads us away from exploring Jesus in terms of his relations with the concrete divine persons, and toward the false dilemma of what one might call "Chalcedonian unitarianism." We then no longer know what to do with Jesus' spiritual growth. We debate which divine attributes Jesus did and did not manifest during his Messianic career, assuming that works of power are straightforward exercises of the Word's omnipotence and worrying that they are compromises of Jesus' humanity. Can Jesus have known that he was divine? Is it just a show when he has to ask God for divine power, as he does at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:41-42)? How can he know the future of the Temple but not the time of his future coming (Mark 13)?

These problems have their force only when Word-Christology is isolated from Spirit-Christology. Israel's prophets know more of the future than ordinary people, but even the most clairvoyant can fail to understand what they see (Dan. 12:5-13). They do signs and wonders, but only as God wills (Deut. 34:10-12). We need not worry that Jesus' signs and wonders compromise his humanity, or even suggest human omniscience or omnipotence, if we remember that his power too is the power of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:22-30, Mark 3:22-30, Luke 11:14-23 and 12:9-10, John 3:31-36). This is the same power given to the disciples who do even greater works (John 14:12-17, Acts 3ff). Moses and Elijah visit Jesus at his transfiguration (and

³⁵ So Coffey is right to emphasize that, in del Colle's words, "the title 'Christ' is precisely that, a title connoting the office of Jesus and not descriptive of his inner being" (del Colle, 121).

resurrection? and ascension?) because his pneumatic work is the continuation of their own (Luke 9:28-36, Mark 9:2-10, Matt. 17:1-9).

Baptism to Burial: Our New Relationship with the Holy Spirit

At the inauguration of Jesus' work, anointing follows self-sacrifice. At the climax, resurrection follows self-sacrifice. These events are unique, in that Jesus does in them what the rest of us can never do. They are also typical, in that they become paradigmatic for the lives of Jesus' disciples. *We* repent, are baptized, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). *We* are buried with Christ in order to rise with him to new life (Rom. 6:1-11, 1 Cor. 15). *We* ascend to God's presence and protection (Col. 3:3-4). Here it is appropriate that the epistles read on the Sunday after Epiphany in all three years of the lectionary cycle are passages from Acts which remember the Church as gaining the benefits of Jesus' baptism. If these events were merely unique, we could not follow in Jesus' steps. If they were merely typical, we could only fall short in trying (Acts 19:1-7, Sunday after Epiphany, Year B). Jesus' career is significant for us because it creates for his brothers and sisters human relationships with God that can be *shared* (Acts 8:14-17, Sunday after Epiphany, Year C). In our baptisms, we become willing martyrs, dying in Christ and sharing in God's vindication of Christ. We are adopted as children to inherit with the natural Son, and know it because the Spirit crying "Abba! Father!" now lives in *our* hearts (Gal. 4:6). The seal of these new relationships is an indwelling Holy Spirit who joins us to each other and to the head of Christ's body, in a divine-human communion of Father, Son, Spirit, and Church. Our incorporation into Christ is enabled, effected, and sealed by the gift of the Holy

Spirit. The baptism of Jesus is the beginning of his ministry (Luke 3:23), the sacrament of Israel's restoration, and the point of departure for the Christian doctrine of the Church.³⁶

These features lead us naturally into the ministerial shape of that restoration, in which we along with Jesus are chosen to contribute.

³⁶ Del Colle, 121: "In scholastic language, [the Father's presence to Jesus in divine sonship] is the proper work of the Son in the grace of union at the basis of the incarnation, while [the Father's presence in anointing] in the person of the Holy Spirit is associated only with the created grace of Jesus' humanity, giving a strong pneumatological cast to the consequent grace of headship mediated by Christ to all humanity."