

Festival of the Baptism of Jesus
Sunday, 10 January 2010
Anniversary Day of the Founding of the Bat Kol Institute



Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1.10-11).

Jesus had an I-Thou encounter with God his Father. He blossomed. He began to teach, to heal and to exorcise demons. Before his baptism Jesus was basically unknown.

Scripture abounds with stories of an encounter with God, understood as coming into a relationship with a Presence that is perceived as strength.

In the Beginning, when the rushing spirit of God (*ruah elohim*), hovered (merachefet, i.e., like a dove) over the *tohu vavohu* (a wild and waste abyss), the abyss blossomed.

After Saul was anointed king, the spirit of God fell upon him, and he blossomed: “God gave him a new heart” (1 Samuel 10.6, 9).

When Isaiah encountered the Spirit of God ‘with him,’ he proclaimed: “The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, ... and release to prisoners (Isaiah 61.1-2).

After Jesus’ baptism and his retreat into the desert, he returned to Nazareth, entered the synagogue he regularly attended, opened the scroll of Isaiah and proclaimed: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor... to let the oppressed go free... (Luke 4. 18-19).

The baptism of Jesus illustrates a life-changing moment, a major turn on the road of life from which there is No Going Back. Such moments are necessarily few and far between. Conversation with God is not just one dramatic encounter or something that occurs apart from or above the everyday. God’s address to us, God’s spirit, penetrates the events in all our lives and all the events in the world around us, everything biographical and everything historical, and invites us to be fruitful and multiply. We encounter God’s spirit, God’s touch as sunshine, rain and warmth when we open our hearts to all those we meet, including the young prostitute in the street, the woman who has just had an abortion, the homosexual rejected by society, all of whom sat and conversed with a young Galilean man who knew he was the beloved son of God.

Hag Sameach to each and all.

Maureena

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