

## The Baptism of the Lord

George Washington Carver, the great black agricultural scientist did a lot of research work on the commercial and medical uses of the lowly peanut. He built a great industry through his scientific endeavors. In January, 1921, he came to Washington, D.C., to the *Ways and Means Committee* to explain his work on the peanut. As a black man, he was last on the list and so, after three days of waiting, he finally walked up the aisle to speak, ignoring the racial comments and ridicule. Later he wrote in his autobiography, "Whatever they said of me, I knew that I was a child of God, and so I said to myself inwardly, 'Almighty God, let me carry out Your will.'" He got to the podium and was told that he had twenty minutes to speak. Carver opened up his display case and began to explain his project. So engaging was his discussion that those twenty minutes went all too quickly, and the chairman rose and asked for an extension so he could continue his presentation, which he did for several hours. At the end of his talk they all stood up and gave him a long round of applause. And all that happened because he knew who, and Whose, he was and because he refused to be defined by the labels of his culture.

The Baptism of Jesus was a pivotal moment for Jesus, His family, and the people of Israel. For thirty years Jesus lived in obscurity. We assume he embraced the occupation of Joseph and practiced carpentry. Yet, we don't know. But whatever He did, after His baptism Jesus knew He had the Father's mission to proclaim.

When Jesus went down to the Jordan River to be baptized He began His identification with us as sinful human beings. Jesus didn't need to be baptized, but like all that he would do for the rest of his life on earth he came to show us that He is one with us and that we are one with the Father.

This mission that Jesus embraced would be a stretching out of his arms to the Father and to us. He would unite us to Himself so that we might be united to the Father. Yet, we didn't deserve this honor. We had lost that relationship in the Fall. But now, Jesus will restore it by His own blood shed on the cross. So, before that fateful moment came He would lead us into a deeper understanding of this great love that God has for us even though we are sinners. His baptism is that first identification.

In some ways this identification was something hinted at by the prophets for centuries. Even when Israel was in exile God promised a time of renewal akin to a banquet where there would be enough food and wine for everyone and it wouldn't be only for the rich, but even the poor could dine sumptuously. It would be as generous as the rain that comes from the heavens. When God makes it rain he soaks everything. Sometimes we wish the rain wouldn't get our cars or clothes wet, but God doesn't worry about such things. Instead he makes the plants and trees grow. He even waters the weeds. God loves all His creatures, even the lowly ones like crabgrass and dandelions.

Jesus' ministry would seek out the lost and forgotten. He would pay special attention to the sinner who thought he had no opportunity for repentance. He touched and was touched by the sick and lepers. His healing power would restore young and old, Jew and Gentile, women and men. Then Jesus would call Apostles who would share in this mission of life and love. The Apostles would be given power to heal and restore what was broken just as Jesus has done.

You and I have been baptized. We share in that same mission of Christ. We are brothers and sisters with the Lord. Jesus has washed us clean and anointed us with the power of the Spirit to do justice for the homeless of our community. We are called to advocate for the young and voiceless and say no more to arrests for youth with minor offenses. We are called to seek a new path for those who have been felons and now want to regain their status in society and seek employment. Yes, we are called to keep our eyes open to those around us and then respond with generous love.

Jesus' mission has become ours. We have been remade in baptism. We have a dignity because of Christ. We belong to the Lord. We are children of God. We have a destiny and a mission. May we live as members of the Body of Christ and relish the baptism we share with Christ who has gone before us.