

The section from Isaiah that speaks about comfort is one of the most encouraging in scripture. He says it not once but repeats himself. **“Comfort, give comfort to my people.”** Ironically, this prophecy about comfort comes amidst turmoil during Judah’s exile to Babylon. The Jewish culture rested upon the pillars of being a chosen people, a promised land, a king in the line of David, and the temple. In the time of exile all that was gone, but Isaiah urges the people because there will be a restoration, a time of comfort when they will receive back their pillars.

C. S. Lewis notes in *Mere Christianity* that Christianity brings unspeakable comfort. It is not that it brings comfort at first, but in answering our deepest longings we find comfort. For that reason C. S. Lewis says comfort is the one thing you cannot find by looking for it. If you look for comfort you will find wishful thinking at first and end in despair. It is in seeking truth that comfort is found.<sup>1</sup>

All of salvation history is a story of seeking that truth and all these stories point to baptism. The waters of the great flood symbolized an end of sin and the beginning of goodness. At the Red Sea Israel was set free from slavery as we are set free from the slavery of sin in baptism. When the Israelites crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land it prefigured baptism which gives us access to the kingdom of heaven.<sup>2</sup> Why do we need baptism? There are four principal effects that came about when sin entered the world through our first parents. They are ignorance, suffering, death, and the inclination to want to sin.<sup>3</sup> Although baptism erases effects of original sin it does not reverse the other effects; though, it does turn us toward God and just as the Old Testament prefigured gains those who remain in God entry into heaven where there are no effects of sin.

Did Christ need to be baptized? No, but, he had a human nature, so as Jesus is baptized, all of human nature is changed. St. Paul tells us that just as sin entered the world through one person, we receive

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<sup>1</sup> *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics, Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 36.

<sup>2</sup> CCC 1222.

<sup>3</sup> CCC 405.

justification and life through the one person Jesus. We could say that Jesus prepares the waters for us. Because of who he is and his holiness, he makes the waters of baptism holy which in turn makes those who are baptized holy.<sup>4</sup> “We then share in the words of the Father. You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” We share in that promise because water which symbolizes dying and then rising in the life of Christ by the sacrament and the words pronounced causes to happen what it says causes to happen. Just the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus the Holy Spirit comes into us, permanently uniting us to Jesus. Because he is Son we become adopted daughters and sons of the Father. That is ultimate comfort.

Practically speaking what does this mean for us? In baptism we receive an incredible gift, but we are also given certain obligations. For one we have an obligation to learn about Christian doctrine, to be able to announce our faith, and to be able to explain it.<sup>5</sup> This leads to another obligation. We know of no other way to gain entrance into eternal beatitude than through the waters of baptism.<sup>6</sup> We live in a world that tries to tell us all beliefs are equal. We cannot accept this because only Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. Any faith that does not have Jesus is deficient because it does not recognize the one mediator that returns us to right relationship with God. The obligation then is to spread the word.<sup>7</sup>

Isaiah tells us cry out at the top of your voice. Our Savior after all commanded his disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit before ascending into heaven. Concretely for those who are parents they have first and foremost the serious obligation to educate their children in the faith, and just as one day I will give an account to Jesus how I passed on the faith to his people, parents will give an account on how they passed on their faith to their children.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. St. Maxims of Turin: *LH*, Friday – after Epiphany to Baptism, OR.

<sup>5</sup> CIC, can. 228 § 1.

<sup>6</sup> CCC 1257.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 211.

Finally the Church reminds us after our baptism we have been made holy and we are to be united with Jesus in all of our words and actions. In a way, the gift that God gave the Blessed Mother at her Immaculate Conception he now gives to us. As the Blessed Virgin Mary remained sinless throughout her life we aspire to conquer the temptations to sin. As we heard on Christmas and St. Paul reminds us again today we are **“to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly”** (Titus 2:12).

Today as we celebrate the baptism of the Lord we should take some moments of prayer to revel in the comfort that our Savior gives us through his baptism and the life of eternity that he merited for us. As we contemplate that gift let us also renew our commitment to live that holiness that we gained on the day of our baptism and then fulfill our obligations to learn the faith and pass it onto the world.

May God bless you.