

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord
January 8, 2017

+

Jerusalem was not the chosen headquarters of John the Baptist. Rather, he looked for water. It was on the banks of the Jordan River where John set up his camp. At first this base of operations was below Jericho. Later it was nearer the Sea of Galilee. In his camp John could preach, interview his converts, and hear their confessions. Once John was convinced of a convert's penitence, he used the ceremony of water baptism as a sign of a changed heart and life. John needed to be near water.

Holy Scripture is exciting! It tells us that one day a young man took His place in the line waiting to be interviewed and presenting Himself for baptism. Perhaps there was nothing particularly remarkable about the appearance of this man. No one likely even noticed. If you think of the line at security check-in at the airport you are probably on the right track. *Jesus just stood there*, moving up as the line moved forward. He was standing with merchants, soldiers, Pharisees, women of the street, and from every other walk of life. All these people were waiting to confess their sins.

In a few short years, in a place called The Garden of Gethsemane, The Lord Jesus would identify Himself with Isaiah's description of the Suffering Servant. But Almighty God's merciful and unnoticed sign of His love for you and me was given at the Jordan River. The Immaculate Son, the One upon Whom the Father looked and found nothing but perfection, deliberately chose to be "numbered among the transgressors" (as Isaiah foretold). Jesus stood in line for baptism at the beginning of His ministry.

It is quite a remarkable thing the way Christ stood in line. This represented *the very narrow and straight line* He took to accomplish our salvation. If you and I were making up a religion, ours would be very different from Christ's approach. Our invented god would enter creation completely disdainful of all human institutions and religious systems. He would suddenly and magnificently appear. He would serve notice of the imperfection of all things and the start of an entirely new age. Dogma and doctrine would be unnecessary. There would be no *religious* practices to speak of. *Every* action would be religious because in response to god's decisive appearance among us.

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord
January 8, 2017

+

Instead of that, we are told Almighty God waited in line for baptism! Christ became subject to the law. In the Gospels we see Him spend a great part of His three-year ministry observing the ceremonial requirements of His religion. Christ Jesus identified with the imperfect state of the human nature He had come to reclaim.

God Incarnate is not Walt Disney's *Tinkerbell*, sprinkling the pixie dust of divine influence over the surface of society. And the Son of God did not delay His coming until the age of mass media communications! Christ was born in tiny Bethlehem and queued up for baptism in the polluted Jordan River. He took a line, a very narrow line, in one small country. His point of entry into His creation was through the sense of sin developed by the spiritual genius and wisdom of the Old Covenant Jews. And He stuck to it! He stuck to it to the point that even in His merciful loving-kindness Jesus felt obliged to tell that Syro-Phoenician woman He was stepping out of line to help her.

All along that very narrow line Christ found points of contact with souls. One by one His holiness entered into their minds and hearts and began to purify and expand their ideas. Jesus lived His life and went to His death in a way (which by the way, was *God's* way). And His followers originally numbered perhaps only eleven men and one woman who was His mother. At Calvary the number was temporarily reduced to two.

So consider His method and contrast it to ours! The religion you and I might imagine and fabricate would contain media savvy and dramatic theatrical presentations. Our advance team would guarantee a packed hall of enthusiastic supporters for the appearance of our leader. We would talk about achieving critical mass. But our approach would convince no one. Fallen human nature wants to be unfettered by the discipline of religion. They hold the human spirit is bound and chained by organized religion. They believe to be free means to be creedless. God Incarnate does not think so! For His grand entrance Jesus did not choose the temples of Athens, with their multiplicity of thought and cynical estimate of the relations of god and men. Christ chose not Athens but Jerusalem and the hard and fast line of the most exacting creed in the world.

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord
January 8, 2017

+

No one has ever produced so great a effect on mankind as Our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ. And it all began one day along the banks of the Jordan River. In a sight commonplace enough in any large city where men and women wait for a bus, Almighty God queued up for baptism.