

The Baptism of Christ Opens the Heavens (Matthew 3:13-17)

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Guidelines (For Groups): Protect confidentiality and follow the leader's prompts.

Ignatian Meditation Process: Ignatius chose this Gospel reading for Week 2 of *The Spiritual Exercises*. Read the introduction and then “ask for the grace.” Then quietly read the passage by using your imagination to enter into the story, sensing and feeling what's going on. Don't analyze the passage or seek insights — *experience yourself as a character in the story*. After the second reading have a “colloquy” (short, personal conversation) with the Lord. You can use the prompts and questions at the bottom to guide your prayer time and journaling (and sharing with others).

Introduction: Jesus didn't need to be baptized for himself, he's the Son of God and had no sin, but he did it for us, for our forgiveness and example. In fact, at his baptism we discover that the heavens are opened to us — and they remain open! We're entering into the Trinitarian society of the Kingdom of the Heavens. Jesus welcomes us to stand with him in the baptismal waters, the Holy Spirit descends on us like a dove, and the voice of the Father affirms us, “You are my beloved child and in you I am well pleased.”

Ask For the Grace: Dear God, my supreme and truthful Commander, I ask for the grace I desire: for insight and power to guard against the deceits of the evil leader and to imitate Jesus.

Imagine Yourself in the Gospel: Matthew 3 (MSG)

13-14 Jesus then appeared, arriving at the Jordan River from Galilee. He wanted John to baptize him. John objected, “I'm the one who needs to be baptized, not *you!*”

15 But Jesus insisted. “Do it. God's work, putting things right all these centuries, is coming together right now in this baptism.” So John did it.

16-17 The moment Jesus came up out of the baptismal waters, the [heavens] opened up and he saw God's Spirit—it looked like a dove—descending and landing on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice: “This is my Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life.”

1st Reading: Visualize yourself in the Gospel story. Don't seek intellectual insights — stay with the imagery. Use your senses to see, touch, feel, and hear. What part of the story are you drawn to? Which character do you identify with or are you a bystander?

2nd Reading: Experience the story in the role of the character God led you to. Then talk with the Lord. What do you feel? How does this relate to something in your life today? What is God saying to you?