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Presentation of Jesus  
Luke 3: 21-23, 31-38

In the early weeks of the liturgical year, we acknowledge two events in the life of Jesus: his baptism in the River Jordan and his presentation in the temple. Wilda Gafney's "Women's Lectionary" passes through neither of these events, but she does bring us to related texts in which we consider the early life of Jesus, the meaning of his life, and God's presence within it. Today's text picks up on the baptism of Jesus not by featuring the typical story of his anointing by John the Baptist, but with the feminine blessing of the Holy Spirit descending "upon him in bodily form like a dove." We hear not John's voice, but the genderless voice of God opening the heavens and saying "you are my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Gafney's selected text proceeds with Luke's version of Jesus's genealogy, which nobody ever reads because it's such a blundering mouthful of unfamiliar characters with unpronounceable names. Nobody is acquainted with Amminadab or Arphaxad. There is a much friendlier genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, which includes such beloved members of the Old Testament cast as Solomon and Ruth.

It's obvious enough that these adjustments in how we read the story of Jesus's baptism are motivated by the availability of a less overtly masculine account of the story. In Gafney's genealogy, she's even improved the record by including the names of women omitted from the standard text - all the mothers whose names are still available to us. What is less obvious is the implication of Luke's genealogy that Jesus is a revelation of God's love to all of creation. I don't come to church to split hairs in front of the congregation by parsing the minute distinctions between the gospels - but this one is worth noting. Yes, Luke's genealogy includes the names of much more obscure characters in the history of God's people, but that is because Luke situates Jesus in a much longer arc of history. Think about it this way: Matthew's genealogy *only* goes back to Sarah and Abraham. Matthew puts only 28 generations on Jesus's family tree. What laziness! Matthew's intention, of course, is to give Jesus a credible claim of belonging to the heart of the Jewish tradition. Notice, by contrast, the end of Luke's genealogy: "the child of Enos, the child of Seth, the child of Eve and Adam, the child of God." Luke's genealogy is more ambitious - and let's acknowledge, less precise - tracing the genealogy of Jesus to the very beginnings of creation. Luke means that Jesus belongs not strictly to people of Jewish faith but to all people.

These differences frame for us the central questions involved with the presentation of Jesus: to us and us alone, or is Jesus presented to us more broadly and universally? Then, since we belong, through baptism to Jesus - for whose sake have we been baptized and claimed? Is it a salvation strictly for ourselves, for our family or tribe; or, alternatively, does our baptism with

Jesus bind us up with the fate of others, even those who are strangers to us, even enemies of us? These are such leading questions that I'm sure you get my point.

Jesus is baptized not just by John the Baptist, but by the Holy Spirit. Jesus belongs to a family that remembers not only the men and the fathers, but the women and the mothers and the children. Jesus lives in a line of faithful people who are not only Jewish in practice and Hebrew by ancestry, but to a great family distinguished by its many differences and now scattered to the ends of the earth. Jesus is the agent of God's salvation, not that he or any of us may be saved personally and individually, but so that all of Creation may be sanctified collectively and corporately.

Remember this in your own baptism. Or, if you're not baptized, remember this anytime you encounter the Living Water. When any of us are touched by the Living Water, we receive both a blessing and a commissioning. Blessing: we belong to God, and we are part of God's everlasting and ever-reaching family. Commissioning: the waters of Jesus's baptism bring us along in God's work, so that we join in the consecration of all of Creation. When we are touched by these waters we receive a gift and a responsibility. The love of God is like a great current that brings us in and carries us along. Not just included, also empowered. In the touch of these waters, receive the Holy Spirit: that God's blessing may become your activity, and that we may be agents of salvation for all of Creation.