

COMMENTARY ON THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST

—by St. Nikolai Velimirovic—

"And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (Isa. 40:5).

The Lord promised to reveal Himself in great glory ... The Lord promised to come ... God fulfilled His ancient promise and appeared on earth. But how did God reveal Himself in His glory? In inexpressible humility and obedience. In such a way that His angels seemed more resplendent, and His prophets greater than He. When the prophet and the Master showed themselves on the Jordan, the prophet caught the eye more than the Master. John the Forerunner appeared stranger and greater than Christ the Lord. Christ the Lord hid His glory and majesty behind two thick curtains: those of human flesh and humility. And so men neither noticed nor recognized Him, while the eyes of all the heavenly powers were fixed on Him more than on the whole created world. Clothed in real flesh and in true humility, the Lord Jesus came from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized by him.

Wonderful is God in His works! Through all His works, He teaches us humility and obedience. He hides Himself behind His works, as the sun at night behind the shining of the stars, as a nightingale in the bush behind its song. He lends light to the sun, and the sun shines as though with its own light, while the fact that it is God's light is ignored. He lends a voice to His thunder and His winds, and they are heard; but He is not heard. He lends beauty to His mountains and meadows, and they are resplendent in beauty as though it were their own, while God's beauty remains shrouded in mystery. He lends beauty and fragrance to the flowers of the field, and the beauteous flowers give off their fragrance as though it were their own; while God's fragrance goes unnoticed. He lends strength to every creature, and each creature preens itself in front of the others, showing off its strength as though it were its own; while God's immeasurable strength neither preens itself nor cries for attention. He lends of His mind to men, and men cogitate and think as though with their own minds; while God's mind stands in a calm from tumult, turning from the world's praise.

Wonderful is God in thus teaching us humility! And He is also wonderful in teaching us obedience. Man can never be as obedient as God. Man sows seed in the field, and then leaves it to God. Man does this sowing in one day, but God

stands over the seed for a hundred days, guarding it, warming it, giving it life and gradually bringing it up out of the earth as a blade, filling the blade with an ear and ripening it, until man once more goes into the field, to spend a day or two harvesting the grain and carting it off to his barn. The raven hatches its young and then leaves them, caring no more about them. But God takes this caring on Himself, and obediently cares for the fledglings day and night. The fish lays its eggs and goes off, but God stays to hatch young fish from the eggs, and to watch over their feeding and growth. The innumerable orphans, both of humans and animals, would not survive were God not to care for them. God watches day and night over all His creation, lending an ear to their desires and fulfilling their needs.

God hearkens to the pleas and prayers of men and fulfills them; He always fulfills them obediently, as long as there is no sin in their pleas and prayers. Prayers, however, that seek to draw God into sin and to make Him a participant in human sin, these prayers God refuses and does not listen to them. ...

And so, man can never be as humble as God, nor as obedient as He. Through all His creation on heaven and earth, God teaches men humility and obedience. God offers this message to mankind out of His great love for men and out of His burning desire that all men be saved, and that not one of them perish.

God gave all this teaching on humility and obedience to men indirectly, either through created nature or through His prophets, chosen men, and angels. Only in the Person of the Lord Jesus did God give this teaching directly, through Himself clothed in flesh. In every moment of His earthly life, from His birth in the cave to His death on the Cross, the Lord Jesus was a living example, teaching men humility and obedience. He gave this living teaching also through His baptism in the Jordan.

John was the hero of the day. Christ was known to no one, and even when they knew Him, sinful men thought John to be greater than Him. The people flocked to John from all sides: the simple and the learned, the poor and the rich. John was eye-catching, both by his external appearance and by his ascetic life in the desert, and also by his strange words ... Christ did not arouse curiosity. In the midst of the crowd, He slowly went up to the Jordan. There was nothing about Him that caught the eye of the people, and nobody paid any attention to Him. His appearance was not as remarkable as John's, nor His clothing so unusual, nor His life so harshly ascetic.

However, in all that mass of people by the Jordan, there was one man, and one only, who truly knew Him. This was John the Baptist himself ... John forgot all about the rest of the crowd, and pointing to Jesus he said, "**Behold the Lamb of God**" (**Jn. 1:29**). "The Lamb of God!" With these four words, the Forerunner expressed the humility and obedience of Christ the Lord. He is humble as a lamb, and obedient as a lamb. He says, "The Lamb of God," because He goes meekly and humbly as a lamb. As a lamb goes both to pasture and to slaughter with the same trust in his shepherd, so Christ goes wherever His heavenly Father guides Him: to birth in a cave, to baptism in the Jordan, and to death on the Cross—all with the same readiness and trust.