

## **Mark 1:4-11**

This week's gospel reading presents the story of Jesus' own baptism at the hands of John the Baptist. The stage is carefully set for this dramatic scene. But here in Mark's gospel, at least, the drama that finally occurs is a one-man show.

Like the other gospels, Mark begins by introducing John the Baptist. Already foreshadowing John's mission in the Old Testament Scriptures, Mark combines in verses 2-3, the gospel writer now proceeds to describe precisely what John offers people in that "wilderness" setting: "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (v.4). The interrelationship among these three actions--repentance, baptism and forgiveness is firmly in divine hands. The more delicate relationship among these three activities places the impetus behind repentance, baptism and forgiveness firmly in divine hands. Repentance, like the forgiveness of sins, is a gracious divine gift. This is why John looks forward to the arrival of the "one who is more powerful than I . . . coming after me" (v.7). While John's witness may open people up to the gifts of repentance and forgiveness, John recognizes that the baptism he can offer seekers is simply a symbolic gesture, a baptism with water only. The one whom he proclaims as yet to come will offer a truly new gift--baptism with the Holy Spirit.

If Jesus is the one John the Baptist had been sent to announce, why should this "more powerful" one have to experience the baptism with water John offers? Since Jesus does not need his heart opened to repentance, nor does he need divine forgiveness, this event clearly serves a different purpose in his life.

First, what Jesus' baptism does is formally announce his presence and inaugurate the beginning of his public ministry. Second, to the reader, this event reveals Jesus' true identity and relationship to God as "my Son, the Beloved" (v.11). Finally, Jesus' baptism with water serves as the impetus for the arrival of the foretold Holy Spirit whose presence has been proclaimed as the special mark of Jesus' ministry.