

JORDAN RIVER

New Testament Scriptures to Read: Matthew 3; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:1-22

Old Testament Scriptures to Read: Joshua 3



Jordan River (near Dead Sea)

The Jordan River rises on the slopes of Mt. Hermon near the Syrian-Lebanese border, flows southward through northern Israel into the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Flowing out of the Sea of Galilee on its south shore, the Jordan River continues south and drains into the Dead Sea. Jordan (in Hebrew, *Ha-Yarden*) literally means “the descender.” And descend it does, from over 1,000 ft (305m) above sea level at the foot of Mt. Hermon to more than 1,300 ft (400m) below sea level at the Dead Sea.

After the miraculous exodus from Egypt, Joshua led the Israelites out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land by crossing the Jordan River. The waters of the river stopped flowing as the Levites, who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant, waded into the Jordan, allowing the Israelites to cross on dry land. Jesus is a new Joshua (Jesus’ name is the Greek translation of the Hebrew name Joshua, *Yehoshua*) who will lead God’s people into the Promised Land of Heaven by His death on the Cross and the water that flows from his side, a sign of the Baptism of the New Covenant.

On the Water of Our Lord’s Baptism

By Richard Crashaw

Each blest drop,
on each blest limb,
Is washt itself, in washing him:
Tis a Gem while it stays here,
While it falls hence ‘tis a Tear.

Recalling the first entrance of God’s People into the Promised Land, John the Baptist called the Jews to come out into the wilderness to be baptized and thus to reenter the Promised Land purified by the baptism of repentance. Jesus himself travels out to the wilderness where John the Baptist is baptizing and instructs John to baptize him in the Jordan River. As Jesus is baptized the Holy Spirit “descends” on Jesus and the Father’s voice is heard from Heaven, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Here the Holy Trinity is revealed for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Even though he is without sin, Jesus submits to John’s baptism, not for forgiveness of sin, but rather that he might sanctify the waters of Baptism for each of us, as the liturgy teaches, “To make holy the flowing waters [John] baptized the very author of Baptism.”

Some thoughts for your reflection and *lectio* on these passages and events of Scripture:

- At Jesus’ Baptism, God the Father proclaims, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” At our Baptism we too became a child of God, and hear these same words spoken of us. Take some time to pray the first Luminous Mystery of the Rosary on Jesus’ Baptism in the Jordan River and hear anew these words of the Father.

CAPERNAUM

New Testament Scriptures to Read: Matthew 4:12-17, 4:23-25, 8:5-13, 11:20-24; Mark 1:21-31, 2:1-12; Luke 4:31-41, 7:1-10, 10:13-15; John 4:46-53, 6:25-59

After his Baptism in the Jordan River, Jesus begins his three-year ministry, making Capernaum and Peter's house his "home base." The very name of this town shines a brilliant light which reveals why Jesus chooses this location to begin his public ministry. "Caper" means "village" and "naum" means "consolation," thus *capernaum* means "village of consolation." The prophet Isaiah begins the second section of his writings proclaiming, "Comfort, comfort my people says your God... the glory of the Lord shall be revealed" (Isaiah 40:1,5). Thus Jesus, who will bring about the comfort and consolation of God's people, the pardon of their sins, and who will reveal the glory of the Lord, begins his public ministry in Capernaum, the village of consolation.



Ruins around Capernaum synagogue



Internal ruins of Capernaum synagogue

The white stone synagogue ruins of a later synagogue sit over the black basalt foundation of the synagogue used in Jesus' day, some of which are still visible. The large, once beautiful synagogue and its associated ruins indicate the large, active Jewish community that once lived in Capernaum. Often connected to a synagogue was a school for teaching and studying the Torah. Here the brightest young boys were chosen to study. Behind Capernaum's synagogue is a large section of ruins indicating that the Torah school there was of considerable size. Given such a large and active community, likely even those not chosen to study the Torah exclusively would none the less have been very familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures, making it a perfect place for Jesus to center his Galilean ministry.

Having left their more pagan hometown of Bethsaida, Peter and Andrew move to Capernaum and its thriving Jewish community to live and run their fishing business. Here Jesus extends his call to "follow me" and they respond. The church at Capernaum is built overtop of St. Peter's house, the ruins of which can be seen through the glass floor at the church's center. The gospel of Matthew recalls Jesus entering Peter's house and healing Peter's mother-in-law who was sick with fever and healing many who were brought to him here at this site (Matt 8:14). Here in Capernaum Jesus taught in the synagogue, gave his Bread of Life discourse (John 6), and worked many miracles, but many there did not come to faith. For this Jesus spoke against Capernaum, and the city was never rebuilt after being abandoned centuries later.

Some thoughts for your reflection and *lectio* on these passages and events of Scripture:

- Jesus spent many hours in Peter's home with the disciples. Jesus wants to enter the home of our heart and life and spend much time with us also.
- Peter opened his home and life to Jesus, and because of it a great number of people encountered Christ there. How can my home be a place where many encounter Christ and the gospel?