

III. OT Types and Figures

Much of this session will follow Ambrose's *On the Mysteries*, a catechism prepared around 387. *On the Mysteries* is enhanced by a reading of Tertullian's *On Baptism*, which is nearly 200 years older.

Ambrose was bishop of Milan (374-397) and a doctor of the church. He was the Western contemporary of the Eastern bishop Basil of Caesarea. He stifled the Arian controversy in his own district. His title 'doctor of the church' is a testimony to the value of his many writings. He delighted in the allegorico-mystical interpretation of Scripture (the Alexandrian school) - while admitting the natural or literal sense he sought everywhere a deeper mystical meaning that he converted into practical instruction for Christian life.

Creation

Consider, however, how ancient is the mystery prefigured even in the origin of the world itself. In the very beginning, when God made the heaven and the earth, *the Spirit*, it is said, *moved upon the waters*. He Who was moving upon the waters, was He not working upon the waters? But why should I say, working? As regards His presence He was moving. Was He not working Who was moving? Recognize that He was working in that making of the world, when the prophet says: *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all their strength by the spirit of His mouth*. Each statement rests upon the testimony of the prophet, both that He was moving and that He was working. Moses says that He was moving, David testifies that he was working. (Ambrose)

Genesis 1:2

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

Water was the first to produce that which had life, that it might be no wonder in baptism if waters knows how to give life.

But it will suffice to have thus called at the outset those points in which withal is recognized that primary principle of baptism – which was even then fore-noted by the very attitude assumed for a type of baptism – that the Spirit of God, who hovered over [the waters] from the beginning, would continue to linger over the waters of the baptized. (Tertullian)

The Flood

Take another testimony. All flesh was corrupt by its iniquities. *My Spirit, says God, shall not remain among men, because they are flesh.* Whereby God shows that the grace of the Spirit is turned away by carnal impurity and the pollution of grave sin. Upon which, God, willing to restore what was lacking, sent the flood and bade just Noah go up into the ark. And he, after having, as the flood was passing off, sent forth first a raven which did not return, sent forth a dove which is said to have returned with an olive twig. You see the water, you see the wood [of the ark], you see the dove, and do you hesitate as to the mystery? (Ambrose)

The Flood cont'd

The water, then, is that in which the flesh is dipped, that all carnal sin may be washed away. All wickedness is there buried. The wood is that on which the Lord Jesus was fastened when He suffered for us. The dove is that in the form of which the Holy Spirit descended, as you have read in the New Testament, Who inspires in you peace of soul and tranquility of mind. The raven is the figure of sin, which goes forth and does not return, if, in you, too, inwardly and outwardly righteousness be preserved. (Ambrose)

1 Peter 3:21

In [the ark] a few - that is, eight people - were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For just as, after the waters of the deluge, by which the old iniquity was purged— after the baptism, so to say, of the world — a dove was the herald which announced to the earth the assuagement of celestial wrath. . . so by the self-same law of heavenly effect, to earth— that is, to our flesh — as it emerges from the font, after its old sins flies the dove of the Holy Spirit, bringing us the peace of God, sent out from the heavens where is the Church, the typified ark. (Tertullian)

The Cloud and the Sea

There is also a third testimony, as the Apostle teaches us: *For all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized to Moses in the cloud and in the sea.* And further, Moses himself says in his song: *You sent Your Spirit, and the sea covered them.* You observe that even then holy baptism was prefigured in that passage of the Hebrews, wherein the Egyptian perished, the Hebrew escaped. For what else are we daily taught in this sacrament but that guilt is swallowed up and error done away, but that virtue and innocence remain unharmed? (Ambrose)

1 Corinthians 10:1-4

Now I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.

What figure more manifestly fulfilled in the sacrament of baptism? The nations are set free from the world by means of water, to wit: and the devil, their old tyrant, they leave quite behind, overwhelmed in the water. (Tertullian)

Naaman

Lastly, let the lessons lately gone through from the Kings teach you. Naaman was a Syrian, and suffered from leprosy, nor could he be cleansed by any. Then a maiden from among the captives said that there was a prophet in Israel, who could cleanse him from the defilement of the leprosy. . . Elisha, however, sent word to the king, that he should send the Syrian to him, that he might know there was a God in Israel. And when he had come, he bade him dip himself seven times in the river Jordan. . . Then he began to reason with himself that he had better waters in his own country. . . yet on the advice and persuasion of his servants he yielded and dipped himself. And being immediately cleansed, he understood that it is not of the waters but of grace that a man is cleansed. (Ambrose)

Naaman cont'd

Understand now who is that young maid among the captives. She is the congregation gathered out of the Gentiles, that is, the Church of God held down of old by the captivity of sin, when as yet it possessed not the liberty of grace, by whose counsel that foolish people of the Gentiles heard the word of prophecy as to which it had before been in doubt. Afterwards, however, when they believed that it ought to be obeyed, they were washed from every defilement of sin. (Ambrose)

Naaman's story is recorded in 2 Kings 5.

Circumcision

You were also circumcised with a circumcision not done with hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of the Messiah. Having been buried with Him in baptism, you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive with Him and forgave us all our trespasses.

(Colossians 2:11-13)

Tevilah: Jewish Ritual Washing

A *tevilah* is a full body immersion in a *mikveh*, a tub with a natural water source such as a stream. *Tevilah* is performed at various times such as conversion to Judaism, when women complete menstruation, when men or women experience unusual genital discharges, after contact with a corpse, and prior to *Yom Kippur*. Many of these traditions arose in the synagogue period prior to the NT. Thus John's baptism - as a ritual - was not revolutionary, though his preaching was.

Jesus' instructions to the blind man in John 9:7-11 probably represent an example of *tevilah*, while also pre-figuring the spiritual healing and enlightenment of the sacrament of baptism.

John 9:7-11

“Go,” He told him, “wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means “Sent”). So he left, washed, and came back seeing.

His neighbors and those who formerly had seen him as a beggar said, “Isn’t this the man who sat begging?” Some said, “He’s the one.” “No,” others were saying, “but he looks like him.”

He kept saying, “I’m the one!”

Therefore they asked him, “Then how were your eyes opened?”

He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So when I went and washed I received my sight.”

The Pool Called Bethesda

Lest any think it too hard for belief that a holy angel of God should grant his presence to waters, to temper them to man's salvation; while the evil angel holds frequent profane commerce with the selfsame element to man's ruin. . . an example of what was to come to pass has forerun. An angel, by his intervention, was wont to stir the pool at Bethesda. They who were complaining of ill-health used to watch for him; for whoever had been the first to descend into them, after his washing, ceased to complain. This figure of corporeal healing sang of a spiritual healing, according to the rule by which things carnal are always antecedent as figurative of things spiritual. And thus, when the grace of God advanced to higher degrees among men, an accession of efficacy was granted to the waters and to the angel. They. . . now save peoples in a body daily, death being done away through ablution of sins. The guilt being removed, of course the penalty is removed too. (Tertullian)

John 5:2-4

By the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool, called Bethesda in Hebrew, which has five colonnades. Within these lay a large number of the sick – blind, lame, and paralyzed – waiting for the moving of the water, because an angel would go down into the pool from time to time and stir up the water. Then the first one who got in after the water was stirred up recovered from whatever ailment he had.