

## THE LORD'S BAPTISM AND THE DOVE

Rev. Donald L. Rose

*Lesson: Mark 1*

We have just read the story of the Lord's coming to the Jordan River where people were flocking to be baptized. They came to John, the Baptist, who did the simple act of washing. This pictured the washing away of what is wrong. And Jesus also came to be baptized. John was surprised and did not feel that he had the right to be part of a ceremony involving the Lord. But Jesus said it should be done.

At the special moment of baptism there was seen a dove coming down from heaven and coming to rest upon Jesus. Of all the birds, the dove has a meaning of cleanness and purity. Like the lamb of the animal kingdom, it is white and gentle. And do you know that John called the Lord a lamb, when he saw Him coming to be baptized? He said,

*"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1: 29).*

You probably know that a lamb is the symbol of innocence and gentleness. Every little child has the quality of innocence. All who are willing to follow the Lord may be called the sheep or lambs of His pasture. But there is one who is Innocence itself. There is one who may be called *"the lamb"* (See *Heaven and Hell* 282).

The nature of the dove is also something we should all have. *We are to be as wise and as careful as serpents, but as harmless as doves (Matthew 10: 16).* In your life you want to have a good effect on others and on the world. You want to be one who helps and upholds, and you do not want to be one that harms things, ruins things, hurts others. If you did ruin or break something that was good, you would be sorry for it, and you would wish not to be harmful in that way again. And so you can understand the disciples wanting to be harmless as doves, and you can understand why we look to Him who *"takes away the sin of the world."*

When do you see birds? Sometimes you might go looking for them. You might go to a place just to watch them. Other times you just notice them when you are not expecting to see them. Someone points up and says, "Look at that flock of birds flying." You may notice a bird on a branch, or the bird may just catch your attention as it flies away.

Well, in the spiritual world birds very often appear, and there when they appear, angels know that they mean something. If ugly dark birds circled around with moaning cries, you would know it was some kind of trouble. If a noble bird appeared, you would sense that it meant something good.

The Writings tell us, "*Doves often appear in heaven; and whenever they appear, the angels know that they are correspondences*" (TCR 144). They tell something about the thoughts and feelings of those nearby.

Can you imagine different kinds of good thoughts and feelings? You feel good when thinking about what you really care about and love. Listen to a true story about something Swedenborg really cared about and was thinking deeply about.

Swedenborg had once heard a voice from the highest heaven saying that it was important for people to know the truth about the love that the Lord provides between one man and one woman. And a married couple from heaven was sent down for him to see, and he noticed that they had doves in their hands (*Conjugal Love* 42).

Well, later Swedenborg awakened one morning to hear beautiful music, and when he looked, he saw what was like a golden rain coming down on a house in which were some married couples. He went and talked with them. Swedenborg asked them to tell him the deepest thing they knew about love. At this they looked out of the window, and what do you think they saw sitting on a branch?

Yes, it was a dove, and they said they would tell these deep things. "*As long as this dove is seen, it is a sign to us that we may*" (CL 156e: 4).

But when they had told some things, they then told no more, for they said, "*the dove at our window has flown away.*"

Yet again at a later time, Swedenborg was thinking deeply about the love that comes from heaven, and again he went to the place where the married couples were. Do you know what he asked them first? He asked them whether the dove that had flown away had come back. They said, "*Yes, and it spread out its wings from which we guessed that you would be coming to learn some more*" (CL 208).

Something that is clean and pure and good can be pictured in the gentle, white dove. And we know that all that is clean and pure and good comes from the Lord Himself. And we will remember that when the Lord was baptized in the Jordan River, a dove was seen coming down and lighting upon Him.