

Indiana-Kentucky Synod Sermon and Prayers
Sunday, January 9, 2022
The Baptism of our Lord
Pastor Nancy Nyland, DEM

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 (NRSV)

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the 3rd chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Grace to you and peace from God, the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

On Christmas Day, we celebrated once again the birth of the Christ Child, Jesus our Savior. Jesus, Emmanuel — God with us.

On Epiphany which was this past Thursday, January 6, we remember the visit of the Magi to the child Jesus and how these visitors from afar spread this good news of the coming of the Messiah throughout the world.

And now on this first Sunday after the Epiphany we celebrate the baptism of Jesus.

Given this timing, it would make sense to think that Jesus was baptized as an infant or small child, but he was not. It is thought that Jesus was 30 years old when he was baptized in the Jordan river.

This is a good reminder to us that people are baptized not just when they are infants or children, but at any age. One of my fondest memories as a parish pastor is the day that I had the privilege of baptizing an extended family. There were 13 people baptized that day from 3 generations. — children, parents, grandparents. Surrounded by other family members and their new brothers and sisters in Christ from our congregation, it was a joyous occasion.

Were you baptized as a baby or were you older? Whether you are at home or in a congregation or somewhere else listening to this message:

- hold up your hand if you were baptized as a baby or young child
- hold up your hand if you were older

- hold up your hand if you remember your baptism, what a story to tell
- even if you don't remember your baptism, I wonder if you have been told stories about your baptism
- I invite you to share the story of your baptism with others (family members, friends, people in your faith community). Share your story and give thanks for this joyous occasion.

In our Lutheran tradition, we have claimed elements of Jesus' baptism to form our theology, our beliefs, our faith.

We receive gifts or benefits from baptism. As Martin Luther puts it in the Small Catechism: "Baptism brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the words and promises of God declare."

When we are baptized, we are baptized with water and God's Word. It is not the water that does these great things, but the word of God. Again, as Martin Luther puts it in his Small Catechism. "For without the word of God the water is plain water and not a baptism, but with the word of God it is a baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life and a bath of the new birth in the Holy Spirit."

Luke's gospel today says, "And when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'"

The heaven was opened....can you picture what that might have looked like? The breaking open of the space between the heavenly and the earthly, the divine and the human. God opens the heavens and the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus in the bodily form like a dove.

God opens the heavens and God....God's Spirit descends. God moves from the heavenly realm to encounter Jesus – and, through Jesus, God moves to encounter each one of us.

On Christmas, the birth of the Christ Child — Emmanuel — God with us. And now in baptism, Jesus baptism, our baptism, God comes, the Holy Spirit descends — God with us, the Spirit dwelling in us. God meeting us, you and me, right where we are, just as we are.

On the day of his Baptism, Jesus hears this voice from heaven, God's voice, speaking words of love and affirmation and identity - "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

In our baptism we hear words of love and affirmation and identity, as well. At your baptism these words or similar ones were spoken as water spilled over you and then a cross was traced on your forehead — (Your name) child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

In our baptism we enter into a new relationship with God. God claims you and names you — Child of God. You have a new identity — God's child. This is where your value is found — in who you are and in whose you are. You are God's own — God's beloved child.

In our baptism, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. What a gift!! This Spirit of God dwells in you. The presence of God, with you always.

Isn't that a humbling thought? It is for me. Think about it. God chooses to dwell in each one of us. Amazing isn't it? It makes real for me the verse in Romans 8 that says, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. How can we ever be separated from God when the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ dwells in us?

In our baptism, we die and rise again with Christ, we are claimed as beloved children of God, we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit and we are changed. We are transformed. Not a once and for all event. But a daily dying and rising, a daily renewing of our relationship with God, a daily transforming by the Spirit.

During these many months of the pandemic we have all experienced many changes and transitions, some easier than others. Some have led to transformation in us — as people, as congregations, as worshipping communities — transformation in practice, in belief, in lifestyle, in behavior.

Transformation.....trying new things....experimentation.....doing things in a different ways.....in new ways. Changing well worn traditions, patterns and routines.

How has the Holy Spirit been stirring her transforming power within you, around you, through you?

How is the Spirit at work in the world, in our challenges, in our heartaches, in our frustrations, in our sorrows, in the too many changes that we have had to face? How has the Spirit abiding in you helped you navigate all that has been in the past couple of years and all that is to come?

The Spirit at work in the world — in situations and circumstances, in others, in you, through you — bringing forgiveness, kindness, care, compassion, comfort, grace, peace, love, joy, hope.

The gift of the Holy Spirit. God meeting you right where you are, just as you are and claiming you again and again as God's own beloved child. God's Spirit dwelling in you as close as your breath as intimate as your heartbeat. May this divine guest of your soul, inspire you, comfort you, strengthen you, empower you, ground you, settle you and give you peace. Amen.

Prayers of intercession (God of grace, hear our prayer)

The Spirit of the Lord is poured out upon us in abundance; so we are bold to pray for the church, the world, and all that God has made.

A brief silence.

By the Holy Spirit, you gather your church and send it out in mission to share the good news of Jesus. Inspire your faithful people to be fervent in prayer and service, that all people know they are precious in God's sight. God of grace,

hear our prayer.

You reveal your love and power through water and the Spirit. Guard rivers, seas, and all bodies of water from destruction and pollution. Secure access to clean water for all, and protect the land from drought and flood. God of grace,

hear our prayer.

Establish among the nations the blessings of peace. Raise up leaders who will protect vulnerable people in their care. Strengthen advocates who risk reputation or retaliation for the sake of mercy and justice. God of grace,

hear our prayer.

You protect us through the fires and troubled waters of this life. Assure us that we will not be cut off from you by illness or despair, anxiety or pain, confusion or weakness. Comfort all who are in need (especially). God of grace,

hear our prayer.

We are joined in baptism to Christ and to one another. Bless those who are newly baptized and those who are preparing for baptism. Help us to be faithful in fellowship, worship, evangelism, service, and justice-seeking. God of grace,

hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

You created each of your saints for your glory. We give thanks for those you have called by name into your eternal embrace (especially). Comfort us in grief and release us from fear. God of grace,

hear our prayer.

Since we have such great hope in your promises, O God, we lift these and all of our prayers to you in confidence and faith; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

Hear us now as we pray the words that Christ has taught us,

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**

Blessing

God, who leads you in pathways of righteousness,
who rejoices over you,
and who calls you by name,

✠ bless your going out and your coming in,
today and forever.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go with Christ into a weary world.

Share the good news.

Thanks be to God.