

Indiana-Kentucky Synod Sermon
The Baptism of our Lord
January 10, 2021
Pastor Nancy Nyland, Director for Evangelical Mission

Gospel reading: Mark 1:4-11

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark the first chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ 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, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

On this first Sunday after the Epiphany we celebrate the baptism of Jesus. On Christmas Day (December 25) we celebrated the birth of the baby Jesus. On Epiphany which was this past Wednesday, January 6, we remember the visit of the Magi to the child Jesus and how they spread this good news throughout the world.

Now on January 10, 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 by John.

This is a good reminder to us that people are baptized at every age, not just as infants or children. This reminds me of the time when I baptized a whole family. At one time. There were 13 people baptized that day from 3 generations. — children, parents, grandparents. Surrounded by others 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?

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

- hold up your hand if you remember your baptism
- I invite you to share your story of baptism with others today or this week.

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. 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."

At the time of Jesus' baptism, a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

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. This is where we find our value — in who we are and whose we are.

Our scripture says, "And just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him."

In our baptism, we too 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 you. 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 when the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ dwells in us?

In this baptismal story from our Gospel today, John is baptizing with water. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."

I like the way Melinda Quivik, a liturgical and homiletical scholar describes this baptismal scene. She says, quote, "John, however, describes a different baptism through Jesus. In Jesus' baptism, the Holy Spirit has the central role. It is the Spirit rather than the washing that affects the transformation of the baptized. The Spirit creates a profound change in us because, at least in most Christian traditions, we receive faith that does not result from our fulfilling John's requirement to repent. We baptize infants who have no words of repentance."

She goes on to say, "If John's baptism is our focus, we may forget that we have been "immersed" in God's gracious welcome and "transformed" by the Holy Spirit."

I was caught up the phrases, transformed by the Holy Spirit and the transformation of the baptized. It made me ponder how I am constantly being transformed by the Spirit.

During this time of pandemic we have all experienced many transitions, some welcomed and some not. Some of these 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. Any of this been a part of your life in the last eight months or so?

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, through this pandemic, in our challenges, in our heartaches, in our frustration, 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 and will continue to become involved in this Covid time?

How is 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's Spirit dwelling in you as close as your breath as intimate as your heartbeat. May this divine guest of your soul, ground you and settle you in God's truth.

Stir, Holy Spirit, stir — that which we know not, reveal, that which is wanting in us, fill up; that which we know, confirm, and keep us blameless in your service. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

On this Sunday of the baptism of our Lord, let us offer our prayers for all in need, responding to each petition with words from today's psalm, "Give us your blessings of peace."

For the worldwide church; for those who minister in the church; for all who will be baptized this year; and for their godparents and sponsors: that the Holy Spirit will empower all the faithful for lives of service, let us pray. O God, give strength to your people.

Give us your blessings of peace.

For the waters of the earth; for the seas, the lakes, the rivers; for the wells that provide drinking water; and for the water that is piped into our homes: that God provide clean and nourishing water for all living things, let us pray. O God, give strength to your people.

Give us your blessings of peace.

For the nations of the world and their leaders; for international efforts to prevent war and reduce violence; for the armed forces; for police officers; and for peacemakers: that God inspire all people to work for the harmonious well-being of others, let us pray. O God, give strength to your people.

Give us your blessings of peace.

For students; for teachers and school administrators; for parents assisting their children in home schooling; and for young people who are finding a way toward graduation: that as the

academic year resumes, God give resilience to everyone in the search for education, let us pray. O God, give strength to your people.

Give us your blessings of peace.

For all who are in trouble, want, or sickness; for the countless who are suffering with COVID-19; for medical workers; for people who are hungry or homeless, imprisoned or lonely; and for those we name here. . . . that God grant health and wholeness to a world so filled with pain, let us pray. O God, give strength to your people.

Give us your blessings of peace.

For ourselves: that we rejoice in our adoption as members of God's family, and give thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, let us pray. O God, give strength to your people.

Give us your blessings of peace.

In gratitude for our beloved dead, especially . . . , we offer our praise for all the baptized who have accompanied us and supported us and taught us throughout our days; that at our end we join with them in everlasting joy, let us pray. O God, give strength to your people.

Give us your blessings of peace.

Almighty and most merciful God, you are the mighty Voice from heaven, you are our beloved Savior, you are the descending Dove. We give you thanks for all your goodness and tender mercies, and we ask you to accept our prayers for the sake of your mercy, today and forever. 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 the creator strengthen you;
Jesus the beloved fill you;
And the Holy Spirit the comforter + keep you in peace.
Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Be the light of Christ.
Thanks be to God.

