

LUKE 3.15-17, 21-22
AN EXPOSITION FOR
THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD
THE
1ST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

"The Epiphany in Baptism"

January 11, 2004

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Grace, Mercy and Peace from Almighty God,
the Father, the Son ✠ and the
Holy Spirit. Amen.

The reading we will look at more closely this morning is the Gospel reading for the 1st Sunday after Epiphany, in which we are told:

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." ²³ Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age..." Luke 3:20-23

Water is an amazing substance. Every living thing (organism) on Earth is *mostly* water. An elephant is 70 percent water; a tomato is 90 percent water; of mice and men, water is 65 percent.

The quantity of water on Earth is static – 326 million cubic miles. About 70 percent of Earth's surface is covered by water.

Ninety-seven percent of Earth's water is in oceans. The remaining three percent is freshwater.

Plants transpire water into the air. Most trees give off about 70 gallons of water a day. One acre of corn transpires 4,000 gallons per day.

Water is the only substance on Earth that exists naturally in three forms: solid (ice), liquid and gas (water vapor or steam).

It moderates Earth's climate because it absorbs and releases heat slowly.

It's called the *universal solvent* because, given time, it can dissolve anything except a few man-made compounds.

Like most liquids, water contracts and becomes more dense as it gets cooler until it reaches 39 degrees F. Once it reaches 32 degrees, *it expands instead* and, because of this, floats. If ice sank as it froze, aquatic life would be crushed. The seas would be solid with only a thin layer of liquid water on their surface. The rest would be ice (Department of Conservation and Recreation Richmond, VA).

Water is one of the resources being fought over in Iraq and other parts of the developing world. The current search for water on the surface of the planet Mars reminds us of the vital role that water plays in the lives of every living thing on earth.

Might we not *add* to all that we have said about water in the light of today's Gospel reading? For by undergoing baptism, the Son of God took the water of baptism and made it a means by which those who undergo that sacrament are connected to Him.

Because Jesus Christ was baptized, baptism is not only a means by which our sins are forgiven, it is also an experience that we can say we share with Christ and He shares with us. It is a means by which we are connected to our Savior and He to us.

Why else was Jesus baptized? He had nothing to repent of. Remember that Jesus came into the world to carry the burden of our sins. Jesus was indeed the spotless Lamb of God, and as such He chose to bear the sins of the world.

William Dallmann put it this way: "All our sins He washed in the baptism in Jordan." Luther remarked that "it is at the Jordan that our New Testament really begins."

When asked why He was offering Himself for baptism, Christ said, "That all righteousness might be fulfilled." He meant that God's saving plan, in which a connection with His Son is what saves us and gives us righteousness, requires that all the sacraments must involve Christ personally.

The Lord's Supper obviously involves Christ personally because it is His Body and Blood as He said. Baptism also involves Christ, not just because He commanded it, but because He underwent it. He shared in it.

As baptism testifies to us being linked to God, so Jesus' baptism included testimony of His link to God. This divine testimony is particularly highlighted in St. Luke's Gospel.

Dr. Just tells us that St. Luke's account of Jesus' baptism focuses "on the testimony of the Spirit and the Father that Jesus is the Messiah..."

21 Now ... when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." ²³ Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age..."

Jesus' baptism was an epiphany – a divine revelation – bearing testimony to Him and to others who heard the voice from Heaven, that Jesus was God's beloved Son and God was well-pleased with Him.

You and I should let our baptism be an epiphany for us. We should let the testimony of God concerning our baptism be His revelation to us that we are His beloved sons and daughters.

That is what Luther did and what he recommended that we do.

Pr. Don Stuckwisch writes, "your Baptism is far more than just a red-letter day on the calendar of your life. As you have been taught to confess from the Small Catechism, your Baptism has an ongoing – daily – significance. It is a significance that defines your entire Christian life; it dare not be forgotten.

For the drowning and dying of your old Adam and his cohorts, which began with your personal flood in the baptismal font, is a drowning and dying that must continue throughout your life. In

this life, in this world, there is never a point at which you can say that sin is once and for all behind you. . . . It is a battle that rages until you pass from this world of sin to your true home in heaven.

But this battle in which we are engaged against that sin and your old Adam will not be won by good intentions nor firm resolve alone.

As Christ defeated Satan by clinging to the Word of God and allowing Himself to be killed, so also do you triumph by clinging to the Word and allowing your old self to be drowned by daily contrition and put to death.

In this respect, the significance of your Holy Baptism is continued in Confession and Holy Absolution. That is to say, confessing your sin and receiving forgiveness in the Name and stead of Christ is simply the ongoing activity and realization of Baptism in your life" (sermon posted 1-6-2004).

What did it mean for Luther that he fell back on the phrase, "I am baptized!" whenever the devil or even his own conscience accused him?

It meant that he regarded baptism as one of God's greatest gifts to him. For Luther and for us, baptism can be an epiphany to us that we will not want to forget.

Our baptism — as an epiphany — is a manifestation of the divine for us because of the testimony from Heaven that goes with it. Baptism in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the

Holy Spirit is more than just words, just as the announcement at Jesus' baptism — "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" was, of course, no mere baptismal formula for Him.

D. L. Moody wrote, "And as they came out of the water, the Spirit descended like a dove and abode upon Him, and the voice of Jehovah, which had been silent on earth for centuries, was heard saying from heaven, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' From the time of the disobedience of the first Adam, God could not say that He was well pleased in man; but He could say so now. As Jesus came up out of the water, the silence of heaven was broken: God Himself bore witness that He was well pleased with His beloved Son. What a day that must have been!"

That great day of His baptism was God's endorsement of Jesus, and our baptism is likewise God's endorsement of us by virtue of our connection to God's Son.

Or, ". . . Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father; even so we also should walk in newness of life."

We know by faith that our salvation depends upon an association in God's mind, between us and His Son. His Son's death is to make atonement for our sins. His Son's resurrection from

the dead is the first fruit from that harvest of the departed that will include us being physically raised up on the last Day.

Baptism is a means by which that saving association with Christ is created for us personally and endorsed by God Himself for the sake of Christ who instituted Christian baptism and was Himself baptized.

St.Luke's Gospel tells us:

21: When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened

22: and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

From that day John changes his text. He had preached "Repent;" but now his text is, "*Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.*" "Behold the Sin-bearer of the world; God's Son come down into this world to bear away its sin. I am nothing now. He is everything."

The next day after Jesus had been baptized, John saw Him coming to him and said, "*Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*" Yesterday He had been baptized in the same river of judgment, where all the people had been baptized, confessing their sins, and today He arrives as the Sin-bearer.

We began by hearing about the remarkable properties of water. That may

have been informative but it was not an epiphany. An epiphany is more than interesting information. It is a manifestation of the divine.

May the Word of God that we have heard about baptism help us all to see as, at the baptism of Jesus in the waters of the Jordan, the Epiphany in Baptism. Amen.