

## **Baptized by Water and Spirit**

Scriptures: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22, Acts 8:14-17/Baptism of our Lord C

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### **Scriptures: Gospel Reading- Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**

<sup>15</sup>As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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."

<sup>21</sup>Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, <sup>22</sup>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."

### **Epistle Reading: Acts 8:14-17**

<sup>14</sup>Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. <sup>15</sup>The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit <sup>16</sup>(for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). <sup>17</sup>Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

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### **Proclamation of the Word**

Each time a baby is baptized we say...

***Matt. 28:18-20***

*Hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:*

*All authority in heaven and on earth*

*has been given to me.*

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,*

*baptizing them in the name of the Father,*

*and of the Son,*

*and of the Holy Spirit,*

*and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.*

*And remember, I am with you always,*

*to the end of the age.*

And this week one of Fort Hill's saints, Elizabeth Royal died. Again, I spoke words of Scripture concerning Baptism saying what we Christians believe about death and resurrection...

**Rom. 6:3,4**

*Do you not know  
that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus  
were baptized into his death?  
Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death,  
so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead  
by the glory of the Father,  
so we too might walk in newness of life.*

**Gal. 3:27**

*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ  
have clothed yourselves with Christ.  
In her baptism Elizabeth was clothed with Christ;  
in the day of Christ's coming, she shall be clothed with glory.*

Baptism is the bookends of the life of faith. We are baptized in to Christ. As Presbyterian Christians we do baptize infants, youth, and adults. Baptism is an experience that shows us and tells of God's gracious love, redeeming mercy, and our calling to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. And in our death, Baptism is made complete. We proclaim that the God who claims us in life, receive us into death and resurrection of Jesus. We believe that Baptism is God's act. We profess faith, or in the case of children, we profess the faith on behalf of the child until he/she comes to believe by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we baptize children, parents and the church make promises to share the faith and raise the child into faith.

Have you heard the story about the incident following an infant baptism? On the way home after worship, the brother of the baby who had been baptized cried from the back seat all the way home. Three times his dad asked him what he was crying about. Finally, he answered, "The preacher said he wanted us to be brought up in a Christian home, but I want to stay with you guys."

In baptizing infants we promise to raise children in a Christian home, sharing the Bible, praying with our children, and doing acts of kindness and compassion.

Some of you may have been baptized as youth as part of the Confirmation experience, professing your faith, and being baptized. Or you may come from a different tradition where children are not baptized, but maybe dedicated, then when you choose when you are ready to be baptized. Perhaps you are an adult who has not taken that step. Baptism is a one of two sacred acts, or sacraments we celebrate in our tradition, because they are both gifts and acts given to us by Jesus. All who turn from sin, profess their faith in Christ, and promise to live as his disciples are invited to receive the sacrament. Also, we invite all baptized believers of any Christian tradition to receive and participate in the Lord's Supper, the second sacrament instituted by Jesus. That is a very brief summary of our beliefs about baptism. It is such a rich and meaningful sacrament that we will focus on it in more detail today.

On this Sunday each year, we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus. I know, we just celebrated his birth and Epiphany when the magi came to visit and followed the light of

Christ born into the world. We have fast-forwarded 30 years to the Inauguration of Jesus' ministry which we know and witness through the written gospels. Some have asked, why did Jesus need to be baptized? If he is the Son of God, would he not already have been claimed by God for a purpose and filled with the Holy Spirit?

From Luke's gospel, followers of John had been baptized in the river Jordan. John had been calling for people to repent and turn again to God. And they kept coming out to river to be baptized by John. Pretty soon the chatter began...is this the one who is to come? Is he the Messiah we have been waiting for to liberate us from the captivity of Rome so we might worship God and live in peace?

John very clearly states that someone greater is to come meaning Jesus. Hear again John's words.

**<sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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."**

And then it happens Jesus does come to be baptized joining with us in this act of commitment to God and to God's intentions. But then something unusual happens as John had said, Jesus is visited by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is baptized by water and by Spirit. He is claimed by God, but also empowered to the mission for whom he has been born. Just as we are baptized by water and Spirit to be about the mission for which we have been born.

Can you imagine what that must have been like? Luke doesn't claim that all those around sees what happens. It is a most beautiful, intimate moment between God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit- three in one. A dramatic moment in the life of Jesus where he is commissioned or sent to be more fully who he is called to be. We are told that the Spirit descended on Jesus, and a voice from heaven says, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." As the *Cotton Patch Gospel* translates the words of God which rang down from heaven, "You are my boy, Jesus. I'm real proud of you!"

Do we think of our baptism that way? It is a most intimate claiming which we emphasize when we baptize infants. But we also must remember the role of the Spirit calling us into our ministry, joining Jesus in his mission to spread good news. Jesus says, "Go therefore to all the nations making disciples **COMMA** baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit teaching them to obey all I have commanded..." Making disciples is our first job. Our call as a church then is to make disciples, comma baptizing them. Baptism is important, but only as it relates to our life of discipleship. It is our call as Fort Hill Church. Turn to the cover of your bulletin today...read with me the Vision statement found under the picture.

*Joining together on a journey of Christian faith, we seek to be Disciples of Christ and to share God's love in our community and around the world.*

Baptism is always an act of the community of faith seeking to be Disciples and making disciples. No one can be a Christian by himself or herself. I hear so many people who may have been disenchanted with the Institution of Church use the excuse, I can be a Christian on my own, and I do not need the church. But the truth is the real church needs them to be the church. Church, or the community of faith, is never a solo act. It is a symphony of different gifts being played together to make the music of faith in order that God's love might be shared and good news and acts of compassion and justice might be done. In the Acts reading today, the gospel is spreading beyond the Jews who have come to trust in Jesus' message. The gospel is on the move. People of Samaria are hearing the good news...the mission of God is at work. They are being baptized. But it is a baptism that can only be fulfilled with the power of the Holy Spirit and the connection to the larger faith community. The practice of praying and laying on hands is at work here. Peter and John lay hands on the newly baptized asking the Holy Spirit to move in their lives enabling them to be disciples of Jesus. Making disciples and baptizing is the work of a whole community of faith. All of us have a role to play.

First, in our own baptism, we are charged to be prayerful vessels empty and ready for the Holy Spirit to work in and through us. As one writer states, it is the empty part of the bowl that makes it useful. If we are to be useful for God, we must be empty and ready to receive the Holy Spirit letting go of our own agenda and swapping it for God's agenda. Here is another image of emptiness, it is the space between the walls in which a family can live, love, and enjoy life.<sup>1</sup> So as Christian disciples we must make space for the Holy Spirit emptying ourselves of agendas and expectations and ask, "what is it that I am called to be and to do for the sake of the kingdom of God?"

Our second role to play is as a baptizing community of faith who goes into the nations and teaches all that Jesus commands. We do this knowing that by the power of the Spirit we do not go alone, but with Jesus who is always present with us. If we do not teach about God... If we are not a voice among the noise of our loud world for God, who will speak for God and tell the good news? So many need to hear good news.

In his book *Craddock Stories*, celebrated preacher Fred Craddock tells of an evening when he and his wife were eating dinner in a little restaurant in the Smokey Mountains. A strange and elderly man came over to their table and introduced himself. "I am from around these parts," he said. "My mother was not married, and the shame the community directed toward her was also directed toward me. Whenever I went to town with my mother, I could see people staring at us, making guesses about who my daddy was. At school, I ate lunch alone. In my early teens, I began attending a little church but always left before church was over, because I was afraid somebody would ask me what a boy like me was doing in church. One day, before I could escape, I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was the minister. He looked closely at my face. I knew that he too was trying to guess who my father was. 'Well, boy, you are a child of. . .' and then he paused. When he spoke again he said, 'Boy, you are a child of God. I see a striking resemblance.' Then he swatted me on the bottom and said, 'Now, you go on and claim your inheritance.' I left church that day a different person," the now elderly man said. "In fact, that was the beginning of my life."

"What's your name?" Dr. Craddock asked.

He answered, "Ben Hooper. My name is Ben Hooper." Dr. Craddock said he vaguely recalled from when he was a kid, his father talking about how the people of Tennessee had twice elected a fellow who had been born out of wedlock as the governor of their state. His name was Ben Hooper.<sup>2</sup>

And through the witness of the church, he also knew that he was God's boy, a beloved child of God, of whom God was proud. And that made all the difference...for it was the beginning of Ben Hooper's life.

May we all show the resemblance of our parent God.

May we be so moved by the power of the Holy Spirit to claim our inheritance.

And most importantly, may we tell others the good news. It might just be the beginning of new life for them!

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<sup>1</sup> "Another co-worker of mine recently gave me a book entitled *The Art of Pastoring, Contemplative Reflections* written by William C. Martin. Thought #11 in Martin's series of daily meditations is entitled 'Emptying.'

'It is the invisible center where the spokes of the wheel meet that allows the wheel to move. The pastor becomes invisible, so that the parish may move freely. It is the empty space within that makes the bowl useful. The pastor empties himself of agenda and expectation so that the spirit of God may fill her. It is the space within the walls of the house that gives a family room to live. The pastor creates a space uncluttered by oughts or shoulds where her people may safely live. It is the invisible, empty, spacious pastor who serves the Word. Don't be misled by much ado. Emptying is difficult for the Western pastor,' Martin states, 'for it is likely that you have become convinced that your work lies in the fullness of your mind, your schedule, and your congregation's programs. Yet if you do not become empty, you will never be whole.'" (Quoted by Randy Calvo, *Baptism Made Real* on [www.Day1.org](http://www.Day1.org))

<sup>2</sup> Fred Craddock, *Craddock Stories*, (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), 49.