

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 01/09/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Baptism of the Lord

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, January 9th

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

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Remembering our baptism

We encountered part of the Gospel lectionary text from Luke just a few weeks ago during the Third Sunday of Advent. Today though, we mark the end of the Christmas season as we celebrate the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus presents Himself to John to be baptized in the River Jordan. As He emerges out of the water the entire Trinity is present, inaugurating Jesus' ministry to bring about God's rule. On this day we also celebrate our own baptism as in such waters we have been buried with Christ, cleansed of our sin, and resurrected in Christ to a new life in which we share in His ministry.

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 Commentary

Luke's account of the ministry of John the Baptists was the Gospel lection for the Second and Third Sundays of Advent (3:1-18). John proclaimed a radical call to repentance: He proclaimed a baptism of repentance (vv. 1-6), a warning of coming judgment and a need to bear fruits in keeping with repentance (v.8), ethical exhortation (vv. 10-14), and messianic expectation (vv. 11-18). When the crowds questioned if John might be the Messiah, John pointed to the One coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. This week's Gospel lection features the baptism of the One who John predicted would come. The verses immediately following this week's Gospel text are those listing the genealogy of Jesus confirming His lineage to David (Luke 3:23-37).

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

Luke portrays John as an apocalyptic prophet. The apocalypse was about to occur and the present evil age would end bringing about a new age. The passage opens with such messianic expectation of the crowds. They are expecting a Messiah who will restore the political fortunes of Israel. However, the Messiah who will appear in a few verses will shatter the expectations of the people. He will be a Messiah more concerned with spiritual transformation of individuals rather than the fortunes of a nation. All human expectations will be redefined by the Gospel in every age.

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."

It is not surprising Jesus was baptized. When an Old Testament priest reached the age at which he was entering into his public ministry, he was baptized. He was consecrated, set apart, demonstrating that God had called him into service. Jesus is being consecrated into public ministry in this baptism. But there is more.

People thought the Apocalypse would begin with God opening the barrier between Heaven and earth. We read how the heavens were indeed opened. Yet rather than a host of angels being sent to destroy, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus in bodily form, *like* a dove. Jesus is anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit for His transforming ministry. This event also gives credibility to John's early differentiation between his baptizing with water and Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit continues to play a prominent role throughout all of Luke and Acts. Notice also Jesus was praying. The same Holy Spirit empowers us in our ministry.

In addition to The Son and The Holy Spirit, this passage also has the presence of God the Father (a voice came from heaven) claiming "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.*" This blessing derives from two Old Testament texts that hold much Messianic promise. The words "*beloved Son*" (in some manuscripts "*beloved Son; today I have begotten you*") are thought to connect to Psalm 2:7 and a clear description of the Messianic King. "*With you I am well pleased*" connects to Isaiah 42:1, the Lord's chosen servant and culminates in the sufferings in Isaiah 53. In fact, this whole episode alludes to the Creation account in Genesis - the Spirit hovers over the face of the waters, God speaks, and a new order is created out of apparent chaos (Genesis 1:2f). All members of the Trinity are present during Jesus' baptism. He is revealed as God's Anointed King and this role involves suffering and death, not power and glory.

Reflections

When we reflect on the Baptism of Jesus, we see the first public action of Jesus is to humble Himself. His action reminds us of the importance of humility and servant leadership. Even though the world tells us we must be self-confident and assertive in order to be perceived as successful, we have been called to act otherwise. We must humble ourselves and serve. In the Baptism of Jesus, we also recognize that we too live in this present evil age. As followers of Christ, we have been baptized into the Spirit-empowered reality of the Kingdom of God. We too are empowered to take a stand and face evil and injustice in our time. We are Christ's agents in the world today reflecting His light.

The Baptism of the Lord is a fitting time to reflect and give thanks for our own baptisms, whether incorporated formally into the Service for the Lord's Day or informally on our own. While the act of baptism is simple, it is replete with theological meaning. When we are baptized by water in the name of the Trinity, we share in Christ's own baptism. Baptism is an outward sign and seal of the covenant of grace made by God through Jesus being extended to us. We are anointed with gifts of the Spirit. In baptism we are called to a new life in Christ as members of Christ's body. As His disciples, we live out and proclaim the Gospel in our world.

Many of us brought up in the church were baptized as infants and we literally do not remember our baptism! Despite all the disagreements in the institutional church about who should be baptized, should infants be baptized, should we re-baptize, how to baptize (sprinkle, immersion, pouring), etc., we must understand that God makes the first move. For those baptized as infants, remembering your baptism is claiming your baptism as your own. You are choosing God who first chose you. Our baptism is not just a past event, it is a covenantal gift of

God's grace that we must actively choose to live out in our lives. Certain times in the liturgical year and during regular worship we are encouraged to reaffirm this covenant.

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

Glory to you, O God – your voice is over the waters, full of power and majesty. Your word shakes the wilderness and blesses us with peace.

We give you thanks and praise for the new thing you have done in Jesus Christ our Savior. Baptized by John in the Jordan, you anointed him with your Holy Spirit and claimed him as your beloved Son.

We give you thanks and praise that by the grace of our baptism, you have claimed us as well and poured out the gifts of your Spirit so that we might be dead to sin and alive to you in Christ Jesus.

Continue to pour out your Spirit upon us. Empower us to love and serve you and live as your faithful people, bearing witness to the good news of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.** [BCW 215]

Gracious and eternal God, with joy we give you thanks and praise.

We praise you for leading your people Israel through the waters of the sea, out of bondage and into freedom in the land of your promise.

We praise you for sending Jesus your Son, who for us was baptized in the waters of the Jordan, and was anointed as the Christ by your Holy Spirit. Through the baptism of his death and resurrection you set us free from the bondage of sin and death and give us cleansing and rebirth.

We praise you for your pouring out your Holy Spirit, who teaches us and leads us into all truth, filling us with a variety of gifts, that we might proclaim the gospel to all nations and serve you as a royal priesthood.

We rejoice that you claimed us in our baptism, and that by your grace we are born anew.

By your Holy Spirit renew us, that we may be empowered to do your will and continue forever in the risen life of Christ, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all glory and honor, now and forever. **Amen.** [BCW 466-467]

Source:

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