

Sermon for the Baptism of Our Lord January 12, 2025 jj

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The Holy Spirit often flies like a bird, swooping, hovering, so that His rushing wind sound could very well come from the flapping of His wings. Over the primordial waters at the very beginning of time, even before God created light, the Holy Spirit flew around like a dove looking for a place to rest. But, like the raven that Noah first let fly from the Ark after the Great Flood, there was no rest to be found. The earth at that time was still covered in water, the water of God the Father's judgment against man because of his sin and the fact that every inclination of man's heart was only evil, all the time. And so the raven returned, and Noah and his loud, smelly, frustrated crew and cargo had no choice but to wait patiently, and expectantly for the time that the Lord had in mind to let them out on dry ground.

The world was not under God's judgment only during the months that Noah and his family and all the animals were in the Ark. Ever since He expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the Almighty has uttered the terrible sentence: "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh." When man listened to the Serpent, the devil, rather than to the voice of the Lord God, then the heavens were shut, with no possibility for man to open them. Because of your sin and the sin of all mankind, all the way back to your ancestor Adam, the Holy Spirit was left to hover, He was flying around, waiting most patiently, most expectantly for the chance to come down and rest again. But the Holy Spirit is God and you worship and glorify Him as God, for He proceeds from the Father and the Son. And since the sin that is in all men is an open rebellion against the Lord, a constant rejection of His dominion over your life, the Spirit had to wait a long time to land. There was no man (or woman for that matter) in whom the Father was completely and fully

delighted, and upon whom the Spirit could come to rest. Until...

Until the day your Savior Jesus began His ministry in the flesh here on this fallen and corrupted earth. That was the day when He came to that great final prophet, His relative in the flesh, John the Baptist. Many others came to this wild-looking man to admit and confess their sins, to repent, be forgiven, and restart their lives in an effort to do better. Jesus did not do that. He did not need to do that. But He did come to be baptized by John in the Jordan River. And St. Luke tells you why Jesus, who needed no repentance, came to be baptized along with all those sinners, with all those people like you, who were grieving over the judgment of God against them because of their transgressions.

For when Jesus was baptized, according to God the Father's will, as He was praying a most unexpected and most wonderful event occurred. The heavens burst open once again! The Holy Spirit, who for so long flew back and forth, cawing and crying and giving word to all those prophets back in the Old Testament that a Savior was coming, now He finally came down and landed on solid ground. This bird that John the Baptist saw, and any other witnesses that might have been there, this bird they saw that was the bodily form of the Holy Spirit Himself (not just a symbol) came to rest on Jesus, the bodily form of the Son of God Himself (not just an enlightened man). Then there was the Voice. The Voice of the Lord God, the Voice that once justly condemned you and your father Adam, now speaks blessing, speaks of God the Father being well-pleased once again.

What a day that was; what a day that we celebrate today! The Baptism of Christ helps you continue your focus on the Christmas story.

When St. Simeon held the baby Jesus in his arms and then said that he may finally depart in peace, it reminded you that the baby Jesus was born in order to die and in that way bring an end to death, and for the Christian, death becomes a good end instead. Epiphany told you that Jesus was born for all people, and not just for the Jews. Today you hear that He would go to His death on the cross carrying your sins in His body, all so that the Holy Spirit could flap His wings downward and come to rest upon you, even as it did that one special day upon Him.

In your baptism, the sins that are every day washed away from you, those sins were there in the Jordan River on that great day. They were in the cloudy water that soaked up into His flesh; your rebellion that is wiped out at the font was the load that was placed on the shoulders of your Savior. And He bore it gladly and willingly for you so that you might be free. It all begins with Jesus being baptized, and it all comes to completion when He dies on the cross for you and rises from the dead. That is why Jesus' baptism is so important for you—it makes your baptism the water of life, grace and forgiveness that it is.

Your baptism is not your sign of commitment to God, it was instead the day your Heavenly Father opened heaven to you and gave you the Holy Spirit. Remembering your baptism every day in confessing your sins and hearing God's absolution is how He does this for you continually. Just like what happened to Jesus in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit comes to rest upon you—in a way hidden to you for now—but real all the same. He comes to rest upon you not because you have made yourself perfect and finally acting like Jesus, but instead, through your baptism you have put on the perfect life and death of Jesus like a robe or garment. In the Father's eyes you are none other than Christ His beloved Son! It doesn't matter if you are Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; that's what being the Body of Christ is all about. You need not look for some

extra "baptism of the Holy Spirit," nor for any other signs that you are saved. You were and you are truly baptized in the Holy Spirit because you were baptized in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And so, your life as a Christian continues now with the Holy Spirit on you and within you. Remember, your body is His holy temple and it is your privilege to treat it as such. Bring into your temple that One true sacrifice: the body and blood of Christ that was offered up once and for all for the sins of the whole world. And the Holy Spirit has promised to dwell wherever Christ is present. But the Holy Spirit is not simply at rest; He's not nesting in your heart, bracing for the cold of the winter. He continues to work, creating life in your dying flesh, constantly converting and renewing your heart, pushing you and leading you to pray and serve as you have been made alive with the risen Jesus. It's His job description as Comforter, encourager, as the Greeks call it, Paraclete. He invigorates a slumbering giant of a church that has the potential do such wondrous and amazing things.

Finally, the Spirit brings war within your very being, in which your new nature, alive in Christ, fights against the old, dying flesh that still wants its own way. It is a war that will continue till death, but it is a war already won. Our Lord's victory is yours as a baptismal inheritance. For now, you wait patiently in the Ark until the end. It will get frustrating, and loud and even a little smelly in this Ark called the Christian Church on earth, but in God's good time He will rescue you, in the end the waters of judgment will not touch you, and you will be safe, dry and secure. As His precious, forgiven, baptized child and temple of His Holy Spirit, He will bear you up on eagles' wings and bring you to Himself in heaven to await the resurrection, because now, because of your baptism, with you also He is well pleased.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and
of the Holy Spirit. Amen.