

Epiphany 1
January 13, 2019
“Baptized in Jesus with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16)
LSB 497 “Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord”
by Rev. Edmund Weber

1. Into the holy faith and the universal church (of all nations) -LSB 497 stanza 1
 - a. rescued from the unquenchable fire (Luke 3:17)
 - b. with all God's graces outpoured and love imparted to the believers hearts
 - c. giving praise to God for this most gracious and marvelous work

2. Into blest communion with the Triune God- LSB 497 stanza 2
 - a. guided by the light of the Word we learn to know our God aright
 - b. keeping free from every error and false god
 - c. holding to Christ alone as our Master (Luke 3:22, through baptism we are called beloved sons and daughters through Christ, Romans 6)

3. Into service by the power of the Gospel (fire) - LSB 497 stanza 3
 - a. empowered by the Gospel we submit to God's will, (as did Jesus)
 - b. empowered by the Gospel in trial or weakness
 - c. empowered by the Gospel to contend, proclaim and finally ascend

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, revealed as the beloved One by His Father at His baptism. Amen

I.

One sometimes wonders why God in His infinite wisdom chose something as simple as baptismal water to convey His kingdom of grace to all people. Yet, the imagery of flowing, outpouring water, washing and cleansing water, describes exactly what occurs in the spiritual realm. Water with God's word opens the floodgates of God's graces and mercies.

So, Martin Luther's first stanza of our sermon hymn beautifully says: "Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord, with all Your graces now outpoured..." As physical water is poured upon a sinner, it becomes a life giving water in baptism. For it is united with His powerful word... in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Yes! There is an outpouring His graces. Baptism becomes a cascade of mercy, a continually flowing river of forgiveness in the life of the believer. Stick around for the Bible study after the service today, which is on ... what else? Water.

God in His infinite wisdom chose the antithesis and the remedy for the destructive forces of hell's fires when He chose Baptism as the means of salvation. What we deserve for our sins, God extinguishes with baptismal water.

The multitudes came to John to be baptized in order to be saved from as our gospel reading tells us - "the unquenchable fire of hell."

17 "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."

The sinner who believes and is baptized is saved from this awful judgement. The fire of condemnation is put out by the water of baptism. Where there is rejection of baptism, the fire of hell burns with excruciating flames forever.

Yes, water puts out fire. This simple, observable fact helps one understand the power of baptismal water.

And, baptismal water washes sin away. So, a blind repentant Saul discovered.

(Acts 22:13-16 NKJ) `Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him.

14 "Then he said, `The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth.

15 `For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.

16 `And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

What are you waiting for? Why would one wait to baptize a child and wash away his or her sins? Why wait to become baptized until one reaches a certain age. Is one greater able to receive what God offers in baptism with greater age? Of course not!

To make baptism a work of man's inner strength sets him up for failure. For it is God who does all the work, irregardless of age. By grace are we saved! At all stages of life we are all equally incapable and unworthy of receiving what baptism offers. As John says,

(Lk. 3:16 NKJ) One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

"Not worthy", John tells the crowds- not even worthy enough to untie Jesus sandals. But it is He who will baptize with the Good News of the Gospel. HE will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. He does it all 100%.

So what are you waiting for, Saul?

The title for one of the Lutheran Hour devotions this week was...

"What! Me Hurry!?", excerpts from the first Lutheran hour speaker Walter Maier are still as relevant to today as they were in 1930.

"It seems that Satan and three of his cohorts were lounging around after dinner one evening, discussing what might be done to win people's hearts for hell," writes Maier.

"One junior tempter exclaimed eagerly, "I've got it! I've got it! Let's tell people there is no God!"

Satan looked at him with disdain and replied, "That's ridiculous. The knowledge of God is written into people's hearts; you'll never get away with a lie like that."

Then another young devil chimed in, "I know! I know! We'll tell people there is no heaven; there is no hell."

To which Satan responded, "You fool! Everyone knows that there's often no justice in life. You'll never convince more than a very few that there is no justice in eternity."

Finally, the tempter leapt to his feet. "I have it!" he shouted. "We'll not say there is no God, no heaven, no hell. We'll just say there is no hurry."

Satan's face lit up as he rubbed his hands in glee. "Excellent!" he responded. "The perfect lie. With it we'll win the world."

If the means of grace is not used it is of no effect. God uses baptism to win the world from the devil. So Martin Luther wrote in the first stanza. "In holy faith Your church unite, From every land and ever'y tongue..."

In God's wisdom water is present all around the world to accomplish His holy purpose of bringing the lost into His church. Yet, something so accessible is left unused if not joined with the word.

Walter Maier continues, "Time and again, in spiritual conversations with people, talking about the relationship with the Lord Jesus, we encounter people who seem receptive. They aren't belligerent. They don't close the door in our faces. Yet, they ignore the invitation of God's grace. They might tell us, "This fall when the kids are in school, we can start making it to church. Or they might say, "After Christmas when things calm down -- that's our resolution for the New Year." Or sometimes we hear, "This spring when the weather is better, and it's not such a hassle getting around."

May the urgency of the Ethiopian eunuch be found in 21st century men and women when Jesus is preached! Listen to God's gracious outreaching of another Gentile.

(Acts 8:35-38 NKJ) 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?"

37 Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

And again, Luther makes sure God gets all the credit for this great work as he says: "This to your praise, O Lord, our God be sung. Alleluia, alleluia!"

"Come Holy Spirit, God and Lord". He is Lord. It is His gracious plan and will who alone calls back the lost from all nations and makes them wise men and women. To God alone be the glory!

II.

Luther continues in stanza 2 imploring the Holy Spirit to light the darkness of our sinful hearts.

"Come Holy Light, guide divine, Now, cause the Word of life to shine. Teach us to know our God aright and call Him Father with delight."

So, the voice from above, the Father, was heard at Jesus' baptism.

(Lk. 3:22 NKJ) "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." And we'll hear these words again affirming Jesus at His transfiguration in a few weeks.

There has only been one son that the Father could say this of. His sinless, perfect and holy Son, Jesus. Our sinful thoughts, words and deeds are not well-pleasing to God the Father. But in Jesus' baptism, we are given the our hope of restoration to the Father. For in Matthew, Jesus says these words to John the Baptist.

Matt. 3:15 NKJ) "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

Jesus didn't need to be baptized for He had no sin. But, Jesus entered our world, to take on our sin, and fulfill all requirements of the law for us. "Fulfill all righteousness". What beautiful words for you and I. For the "all" refers to the fulfilling of righteousness of all people - you and I included.

It is by Jesus' death and resurrection that His righteousness is accepted as worthy payment for our unrighteousness. And it is through our baptism that this righteousness, becomes ours and our rags of sin becomes His!

So says our epistle reading from Romans 6.

(Rom. 6:3-4 NKJ) 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

In baptism, our old Adam is crucified and buried at the cross. And a new man arises, united with Christ's resurrection! So, if in our baptism, we are raised from the dead by the Father, indeed we can know our Father "aright" as Luther says! We can call Him "dear Father". Pray to Him as "our Father who art in heaven." For we have been bought back and indeed we too are now "well pleasing sons and daughters" to the Father. We are, in fact, "beloved" sons and daughters. What is said of Jesus is said of all baptized believers!

Let no false teaching ever take away from you this comfort in your life! Luther says in stanza 2: "From every error keep us free let none but Christ our master be"

Yes, when Jesus was baptized it was time for our Master who was mightier than all to humbly fulfill His mission as the Savior. It was time for Jesus to place Himself under the necessity of baptism for He had placed upon Himself the sins of the whole world. He fulfilled all the requirements that we could not to fulfill all righteousness for us.

The Beloved Son says:

(Jn. 15:13 NKJ) 13 "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."

Great was the love of the Father to give His only begotten Son! Great was the love of the Son to do the will of His Father and love us with His life.

The Trinity concurred! The Holy Spirit descended upon Him, anointing Him as the Prophet whose words of salvation are absolutely authoritative. And the Father's voice from above placed His stamp of approval upon the incarnate Son. He was well-pleased that Jesus would willingly save all humanity by giving His life for all.

Again, the Trinity concurs in our baptisms that we are His children and well-pleasing in His sight ...in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost!

III.

What great comfort this is to us. The Holy Spirit brings this comfort to us through the Gospel -the fire of His love.

So concludes Luther in the final stanza. "Come Holy Fire, comfort true. Grant us the will Your work to do".

It is by the power of the Gospel that we are empowered, set on fire, if you will, to live as God's people in service to our God and others.

So Luther says, "**And in Your service to abide, let trials turn us not aside. Lord, by Your pow'r prepare each heart. And to our weakness strength impart, that bravely here we may contend to life and death to You our Lord ascend. Alleluia!**"

It is only by the gracious strengthening of His word and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper that we can overcome our weaknesses, the tests and trials in our lives and not lose all hope.

Peter writes:

(1 Pet. 4:16 NKJ) 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

Again in James 1 we hear from God's word:

(Jas. 1:2-4 NKJ) 2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Contending bravely in our baptismal faith by the Holy Spirit and fire, the Lord promises us the greatest of all prizes.

(Jas. 1:12 NKJ) 12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

We willingly do the will of the Father as our Master, Jesus, so willingly served His Father for our salvation!

Yes, being **"doers of the word, and not hearers only"** (Jas. 1:22 NKJ), we serve our God by the power and fire of the Gospel, never wavering, but bravely contending, bravely proclaiming that others may believe, be baptized and be saved! And finally, as Luther says, "ascend" to receive the crown of life.

All glory to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, this day that we celebrate Jesus' baptism and our baptism, Jesus' approval as the beloved Son and our approval as beloved Sons and daughters, Jesus' service to us as our Savior and our service to Him by the power of Holy Spirit and fire of the Gospel.

So Luther concludes each stanza with a resounding "Alleluia! Alleluia!"
Amen!