

1st Sunday after Epiphany

The Baptism of Our Lord

Lutheran Service Book

LECTIONARY SERIES C

Luke 3:15-22

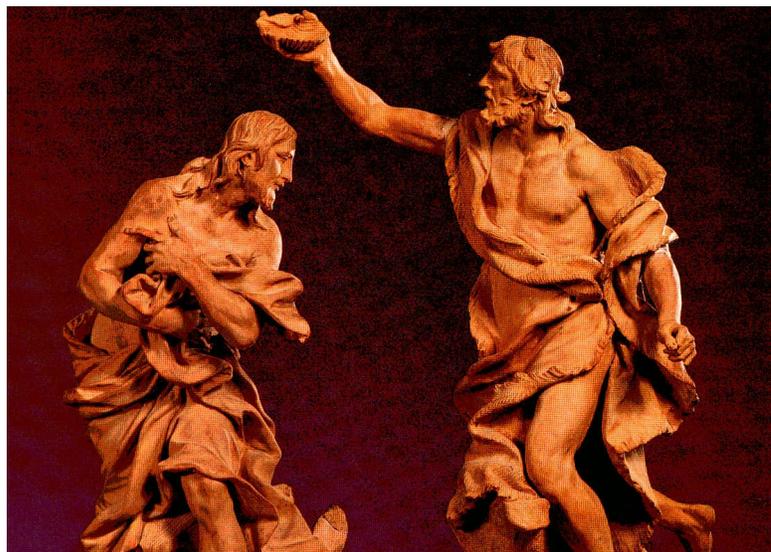
As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His 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." So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.

(But Herod the tetrarch, who had

been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.)

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, 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."

Although today hardly ranks as a major holiday on the secular calendar, nor draws attendance as such as Christians follow the Church's year, you should be glad that you have come today for a festival that truly marks



one of the Gospel's most wondrous events. For on that day at the Jordan River, God made not one but two stupendous, joyous revelations. First, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – the God of the Old Testament, the only true God – revealed himself to be the Holy Trinity. In the man stepping into the water, in the voice speaking from heaven, and in the Spirit's dove-like descent upon the man in the water, people witnessed the self-revelation by the very God of Israel. And through the Gospel account of this event, what they witnessed we learn and believe – that this God is, always has been, and always shall be the undivided Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Just as important for you to realize, however, is God's timing; for the moment he chose was tied to the purpose at hand. for that moment. For in the person of Jesus Christ, God had come in human flesh to be our servant, to empty and humble himself in service to our greatest need. And the day of Christ's baptism by John marked the beginning of that rescue work. In the Hebrew Scriptures we find the coming of our Savior prefigured – Moses is a type of Christ, David is a type of the Messiah. Various prophets foretell the Messiah, and Isaiah even speaks of him mystically as God's Suffering Servant. But at the Jordan River, what which was what is only prefigured and prophesied in the Hebrew Bible God unveils and sets in motion. The Lord himself shall deliver us from doom by making himself our servant.

What does "deliver us from doom" mean? It means from the crushing weight of sin and the everlasting prison of death and hell. So, the first thing Christ has to do is to take the guilt of our sins upon himself. This is why he wades into that filthy water, the river-bath into which all the repentant sinners have washed. In his sinlessness, Jesus makes himself one with us, joins us in our guilt, by receiving

John's Baptism along with the rest of us.

Next, it will be time for him to go and fight for us, to do combat against the devil, and against all the misery that the devil causes and uses to drive people to despair and to lose all faith. For this war, God sends upon his Son the Spirit. From the moment of his Baptism on, and long before he takes our transgressions to the cross, Christ will travel about taking on so much that is the result of sin. He will take on the demonic, he will take on leprosy and paralysis. He will even take on death itself by brining its victims back to life. He will take on blindness both physical and spiritual, and will debate and defeat those who teach lies in God's name. As men will preach of him later on, when...

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

Not in the hour of crucifixion alone, but from the moment he knelt on the Jordan River bank, Jesus gave his body and his life, his hours and his sweat, his prayers and his speech, to helping and rescuing sinners laboring under the power of death. Christ Jesus is God in human flesh, and God 100% at our service. These two truths are what we behold in the Baptism of Our Lord.

His final act, however, was not to take our place on the cross of condemnation. His final earthly act was not even to rise as victor over death. No, for his final action before ascending into heaven Jesus gathered the remaining eleven Apostles and then "reached back." After three years of laboring and serving, after his Passion and burial and return from the coldness of the grave, the last thing Jesus did was to reach back three years to the baptizing by John, take the form of water that John had used, and give it to his Church.

What Jesus gave to the Eleven Apostles was not what John had given before

Jesus started. For in the Baptism that Christ gave us is packed all the power of what he accomplished for us. His Baptism comes with the righteousness of his death, the power of his resurrection, and the pouring out of the very same Spirit who propelled him forward to redeem us. The baptism that you and I have received did not come from John but from Christ, and it joins us to Christ.

And because the same Baptism has joining all of us to the same Lord, it has also made us his community. Those Jews who entered the Jordan valley to hear John preach were a symbol of the Church to come. They all saw their own sinfulness, they all believed the message of the coming Messiah, and so they lined up to receive the same washing. But then they all went home, each in the direction of his own town, his own family, his own work. They all went off in different directions to await the Son of God.

But at Christian Baptism we confess not only our sins, but together we confess the Lord who has gathered us. We gather in his name because he has promised to be with us, and we believe it is Christ himself who presides at every Communion service. We sing of a Lord we believe is here, and it is because he is here that we gather to sing and confess his name.

And right now, all over the world, bands of disciples large and small gather in his name, and all share the same Trinitarian Baptism that Jesus gave to us. No matter what the point of earth's rotation, no matter what sector of the planet it is on which the sun is shining at any given moment, you will find people gathering to confess their sins and to confess Jesus as Lord. Gathering for God's Eucharist to live on the Bread of Life, gathering to pray to the Father for the needs of the world in the name of his Son.

Such is the power of the Holy Spirit in the world, the Spirit who came down on

Christ and upon us. He is our Lord because he has taken upon himself our sin and has robed us in his righteousness. He received the grave meant for sinners, and has given us the resurrection. This great exchange first began, of course, when our Lord was born of Mary. But the work of making this exchange complete really began on the day that we commemorate as the Baptism of Our Lord. ❖