

The Work Of The Spirit

Luke 3:15-22

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

January 13, 2019 – The Baptism Of Our Lord



Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. The Holy Spirit often flies like a bird, swooping and hovering so that the rushing wind which at times accompanies His presence could very well be said to come from the flapping of His wings. Over the primordial waters at the very beginning of time, even before God created light, we read how the Holy Spirit flew around like a dove looking for a place to rest. But, like the raven Noah first let fly from the Ark after the Great Flood, there was no rest to be found. The earth 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, with his loud, smelly, frustrated crew and cargo had no choice but to wait patiently and expectantly for the time the Lord had in mind to let them out on dry ground.

But the world was not only under God's judgment while Noah, his family, and all the animals were in the Ark. Indeed, ever since that moment when He expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden, the Almighty has been uttering the same, terrible sentence: "My Spirit shall not abide with man forever, for he is flesh." When man listened to the Serpent rather than to the voice of the Lord God, the heavens were shut up, with no possibility for man to open them again. Because of your sin and the sin of all mankind, all the way back to our first ancestor, Adam, the Holy Spirit was left to hover, flying around, waiting most patiently, most expectantly, for the chance to come down and rest once again. But since the Holy Spirit is true God. And since our sin – that same sin which has continued to infect all mankind – is open rebellion against the Lord and a constant rejection of His dominion over our life, the Spirit had to wait a long time, for there was no man (or woman for that matter) in whom the Father was delighted, and upon whom the Spirit could come to rest. Until . . . until . . .

Until that day when our Savior, Jesus, began His ministry in human flesh here on this fallen, corrupted earth. That was the day when He came to be Baptized by that great, final prophet, His relative, John the Baptist. Many others had come to this wild-looking, locust-eating man to confess their sins, repent, be forgiven, and restart their lives in an effort to do better. But Jesus didn't do that. Indeed, He didn't need to do that. But He *did* come to be Baptized by John in the Jordan River. And St. Luke tells us why Jesus, who needed no repentance nor to be Baptized, came to be Baptized anyway, along with all those other sinners, along with all those sinful people like you and me who were grieving over the judgment of God against them because of their many transgressions against God.

When Jesus was Baptized according to God the Father's will – and as He was praying – a most unexpected, most wonderful event occurred. The heavens burst open once again as they had few times before! The Holy Spirit, who for so long had flown back and forth, giving word to all those prophets from the time of the Old Testament onward that a Savior was coming, now finally came down and landed on solid ground. This dove which John and all those others saw was the bodily form of the Holy Spirit Himself – and not just a symbol – which had come to rest on Jesus, the bodily form of the Son of God Himself – and not just some enlightened man whom God had chosen. And then there was the Voice of the Lord God Himself sounding forth from heaven – the very same voice which at one time had justly condemned both us and our father, Adam, now spoke a blessing, spoke of how God the Father was once more well-pleased with man – this Man who was standing there in the Jordan being Baptized by John.

What a day that was! And what a day it is that we celebrate today! The Baptism of our Lord Christ helps bring into sharp focus the story of Christmas. For when you hear the story of what Herod did to the male children of Bethlehem

when the Wise Men went home by another route, it ought to remind you that Jesus was born so that He might die, and in His dying bring an end to death. Epiphany ought to remind us all that Jesus was born for all, and not just for the Jews. And so today you are reminded how only 3 short years after Jesus' Baptism He would go to Calvary's cross carrying your sins in His body so that the Holy Spirit might one day rest upon you, even as it rested upon Jesus that day in the Jordan River.

In your Baptism, dear Christian, those sins which every day are washed away from you were there on Jesus in the water of the Jordan. They were there in the cloudy water that soaked up into His flesh. That same rebellion which was washed away at the font on the day when you were Baptized was the load that was placed on the shoulders of your Savior. And that load He bore gladly and willingly for you so that you might be set free. It all begins, you see, with Jesus being Baptized. And it all comes to completion when He dies on the cross for us all and rises again from the dead. That's why Jesus' Baptism is so important – because it makes your Baptism what it is: a life-giving water, full of grace and forgiveness.

Your Baptism is no sign of your commitment to God as some falsely teach, rather it was instead the day our Heavenly Father opened heaven to you and gave you His Holy Spirit as a token of your salvation. Remembering your Baptism every day, confessing your sins, and hearing God's absolution, is how God 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 which is hidden to you – but real just the same. He comes to rest upon you not because you have made yourself perfect and worthy, but instead, because through your Baptism you have put on the perfect life and death of Jesus like a robe or garment – even as St. Paul reminds us. In the Father's eyes you are now nothing less than Christ, His beloved Son! As far as your salvation is concerned, it doesn't matter whether you are Jew or Greek, slave or free, male

or female. You don't need to look for some extra "Baptism of the Holy Spirit," nor for any other signs that you have been saved. You were and are already Baptized in the Holy Spirit because you were Baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

And so, your life as a Christian will continue with the Holy Spirit on you and within you. Your body is His holy temple and it's your privilege to treat it as such. Bring into your temple that One true sacrifice: the body and blood of Christ offered up once and for all for the sins of the whole world, for the Holy Spirit has promised to dwell wherever Christ is present. And where the Holy Spirit is, you may be sure that He is never simply at rest as through He were nesting in your heart for the winter like some hibernating animal. No, He continues to work in and for you, creating life in your dying flesh, constantly converting and renewing your heart, pushing you and leading you to pray and serve. He's busy invigorating that slumbering giant of a Church in which He has placed you – that Church which has the potential to do so many wondrous, amazing things.

Finally, the Spirit is busy bringing war within your very being, your new nature. Alive in Christ it fights steadfastly against your old, dying flesh that still wants its own way. This is a war which will continue until death, even though it's already won. But for now, you must patiently wait in the Ark until the End. It may get frustrating, 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. You will arrive at your heavenly home safe, dry and secure. As His precious Baptized child and a temple of His Holy Spirit, He will bear you up on eagles' wings and bring you to Himself in heaven, because with you He is well pleased. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.