

Epiphany 1, Year C 2022
The Baptism of our Lord
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
January 9, 2022
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Isaiah 43:1-7 Psalm 29 Acts 8:14-17 Luke 3:15-22

We enter into the gospel of Luke today after birth stories: first there is John the baptizer's, then Jesus'. John the baptizer tells us that he is but a precursor to the savior of the world, and that John himself is not worthy to do a slave's task – untie sandals – for this savior, Jesus. John places himself in a place of great humility next to Jesus. In Jesus' birth story, we have moved from John's foretelling, to Joseph and Mary's betrothal, journey to be registered, and Jesus' birth. There are angels, shepherds, and the birth of the Messiah. Jesus is named, presented in the Temple, ... and in two chapters of Luke's gospel, "Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour." John the baptizer is back, waist-deep in the Jordan river, calling the crowds to a baptism of repentance. Adult Jesus is there, and is baptized. In Mark, Matthew, [at least] two things happen at Jesus' baptism:

The heavens are opened [to him – Matthew and Mark]
And the Spirit, the Spirit of God, descends upon him.

Matthew: ¹⁶And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

Mark: ⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Luke gives us a different perspective; the Spirit does come upon Jesus, ²¹Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized *and was praying*, the heaven was opened, ²²and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

but not as Jesus comes up out of the waters of baptism, but when Jesus is praying. When we come forward in a spirit of humility and repentance, turning to Jesus and amending our separations from God, whatever those may be, God's Spirit is with us. We are God's beloved ... with whom God is well-pleased. You are God's beloved. God is pleased with YOU.

Now: about the heavens being opened:

From Luke: when Jesus was baptized and was praying, the heavens opened. It is a fearful thing for the heavens to be opened. It happened in the time of Noah: the flood began "when the windows of heaven were opened." In the Old Testament the heavens open at

other times, and it is *always* about God: Ezekiel saw visions, Jacob had a dream about a ladder extended between heaven and earth; Isaiah pleaded (64.1) “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.”

God did come down. At the baptism of Jesus, God is revealed again in the opening of the heavens and in the voice of God breaking through, proclaiming that Jesus is God’s son. It is the Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit that “hovered over the deep” in creation that comes down from heaven and appears with Jesus. And we hear the voice of God: “You are my Son, the Beloved.”

Luke’s story of Jesus’ baptism is familiar to ancient ears: “thus says the Lord, ... who created you ... you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you ... you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you.” Now these words are being poured upon Jesus with the Holy Spirit, and we hear deep in our memories, I am with you. You are mine. We **accept** in baptism that we are claimed by God.

So this his opening of heaven, the revelation of God to all creation happens not only in the OT, but now in and through Jesus’ birth, in shepherds, kings, Temple-goers (and again at Jesus’ resurrection).

Here (again) we find the scandal of the gospel, not that Jesus is baptized, but that WE are baptized like Jesus was – in water, with the Holy Spirit, being claimed by God as God’s beloved. Baptism is God’s radical acceptance of us in our humanity. In its profound scandal, God chooses to come among us in the deep humility of being human in God’s creation.

Jesus, in his baptism, joins us, in a human birth and then in the muddy waters of the Jordan river, in a life of solidarity with the human condition. Theologian Debie Thomas says it this way: “In this one moment [of baptism], in this one act [of prayer], Jesus steps into the whole Story of God’s work on earth, and allows that story to resonate, deepen, and find completion.” Jesus joins into our common experience of living in this world, and shows us a way in which to continually connect with God and to receive the Holy Spirit.

Bound to Jesus and to one another in our baptism, we are called to do what Jesus does. Jesus shows us a new way of life. We now live into this new way of life in our time, in our particular ways, with Jesus. Living into this faith, being confident of God’s presence, and living a “heaven has been opened” life is not one we can do alone. It takes a community of believers to support one another, to reassure one another that yes, we are beloved children of God, always, and we are, indeed, trying to make earth as it is in heaven.

For everything that God has initiated, we give thanks.
You are God’s beloved; with you, God is well-pleased.