

JESUS' BAPTISM HAS OPENED THE WAY OF HEAVEN TO US**Sermon for the Baptism of Jesus Christ, 2019****Luke 3:15-22**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Gospel from before, Luke 3:15-22 **The people were expecting something and were all wondering in their hearts whether John might perhaps be the Christ.** ¹⁶ John answered them all: **“I am baptising you with water. However, the One who is more powerful than I am is coming. I am not worthy to untie His sandal-strap. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.** ¹⁷ **He has His winnowing fork in His hand to clean up His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but He will burn the chaff with fire that cannot be put out.”**

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¹⁹ **However, when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and all the other evil things he had done,** ²⁰ **Herod added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.**

²¹ **When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was also baptised. While He was praying, heaven was opened,** ²² **and the Holy Spirit came down on Him in bodily form like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, which said, “You are My Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with You.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends on Christ,

Jesus’ public ministry began when He was baptised by John. We could say that Jesus’ baptism is His “Pentecost.” Father, Son, and Spirit are eternally three in one, but here the Father and the Spirit are at one with the incarnate Son as He begins His ministry. This is the most important event in Jesus’ ministry outside of the crucifixion and the resurrection. At His baptism, the Christ, true God and true man, is anointed with the Holy Spirit and acknowledged by the Father. Jesus in His humanity, as well as in His divine nature, is graced with the Spirit and declared to be God’s Son, opening the way for fallen human beings to be incorporated into Christ through Baptism and likewise to receive the Spirit and to be adopted as children of God.

Directly or indirectly all four Gospels and the book of Acts¹ tell us about John baptising Jesus, but only Luke says **“in bodily form”** to indicate the *physical appearance* of the Holy Spirit. This stresses the reality of the Holy Spirit and looks forward to other visible manifestations of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, when Christian Baptism begins.

Epiphany means “manifestation,” so during this season of Epiphany, we consider the things that God showed to His people. It is not too hard to figure out what God wants us to see in today’s Gospel: **heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit came down on Him in bodily form like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, which said, “You are My Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with You.”** This is enough to get our attention. After all, it is not every day that God opens up the sky and proclaims something to us. It is not every day that the Holy Spirit takes on a bodily form to rest on someone. In fact, I think it would be safe to say that this is the only time that all these things happened together in the entire history of the world.

Think about it. **The people were expecting something and were all wondering in their hearts whether John might perhaps be the Christ.** They are ready. All the prophecies have come true. All that’s left is for the Christ to actually show up. John is out there by the Jordan saying, **“I am baptising you with water. However, the One who is more powerful than I am is coming. I am not worthy to untie His sandal-strap. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.** ¹⁷ **He has His winnowing fork in His hand to clean up His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but He will burn the chaff with fire that cannot be put out.”** Then one day the Lord Himself steps down into the Jordan and tells John, “Baptise me.” After the Baptism, the sky opens up, the Holy Spirit comes down, and there is this voice. That is an epiphany.

The wonderful thing about this epiphany is that we get to see our Lord and Saviour beginning His public ministry as He battles to take back what is rightfully His.

¹ Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:15-22, John 1:29-34, Acts 10:38

God has created all things and therefore all things belong to Him. When He created humanity, He said to our first parents, “*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth,*” (Genesis 1:28). With these words God established humanity as His stewards over all of creation. At the time when God spoke these words, everything was perfect. Then the devil spoke with the voice of the serpent and asked, “*Did God really say...*”² God had given everything except the fruit of the one tree to Adam and Eve and yet Satan convinced Eve that God had held something back - that God did not have their best interest at heart. Satan leveraged that seed of doubt until both Adam and Eve lost confidence in God and ate the fruit.

On that day, the universe changed forever. The relationship between God and man was closed. The relationship between man and woman was closed. A wave of sin swept through the entire universe just as a large tidal wave sweeps over an island. Mankind had turned the keys of the kingdom over to the devil. From that time forward our enemy and his allies have had their way with us. The Word of God teaches that we are all conceived and born sinful³ and are under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own. We would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation.

Only a short few weeks ago, we celebrated God’s action to infiltrate this world and take it back. The Saviour entered this world as a baby - as one of us. The only Son of God stepped onto the battle field as a baby in a manger, growing up to be a man. Now, here, at His baptism, God the Father proclaimed His intention to all who were there with John the Baptist at the Jordan.

We must get all excited about this epiphany. Jesus is on the move. The people who were there witnessed the inauguration of Christ’s public ministry. The One for whom they have waited, has now arrived. It was time to celebrate.

But there are other eyes that see this epiphany. There are those who have dreaded this day. God made a promise way back in Genesis, “*I shall make you and the woman hostile to each other and shall make your descendants and her descendant hostile to each other. He will crush your head and you will crush His heel,*” (Genesis 3:15). The devil and the other wicked, fallen angels also see this epiphany. For them, it is time to go on red alert. The Christ is about to start His offensive.

Although we shall not hear of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness until the first Sunday in Lent, it actually takes place right after Jesus’ baptism. The Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to do battle with the enemy and the devil wastes no time in hitting Jesus with every resource at his disposal.⁴ The Holy Spirit inspired the writer to the Hebrews to say that Jesus is the *One who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin*, (Hebrews 4:15). This teaches us that Jesus endured *every* temptation that the devil and his allies have ever used against any person in any place and at any time. The devil pulled out all the stops because he knew that if he could get Jesus to sin just once, the plan of salvation would lie in ruins.

Yet this sentence from Hebrews tells us that although Jesus was tempted as we are, He was different than us in that He did not sin. This meant that Jesus’ baptism was the opposite of our baptisms. We enter the waters of baptism covered in sin and leave those waters covered in God’s righteousness. Jesus entered the water covered in righteousness and left the water covered in sin - our sin. Jesus began to carry the burden of our sin at His baptism. As Jesus went down into the water, He was the only holy man on the earth. As He came up from the water, He was the greatest sinner on the earth. By this we certainly do not mean to say Jesus became a sinner, for He is the holy, sinless Son of God – God Himself. What we do mean to say is that *He carried the sin of every man, woman, and child who has lived or ever will live*. He carried it all.

God the Father and God the Holy Spirit acknowledged the sacrifice Jesus made as He took our sin onto Himself and clothed us in His righteousness.²¹ **When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was also baptised. While He was praying, heaven was opened,²² and the Holy Spirit came down on Him in bodily form like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, which said, “You are My Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with You.”**

² Genesis 3:1

³ Psalm 51:5

⁴ Luke 4:1-13

Christ's mission to open heaven is the will and work of the Triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit puts in a rare appearance **in bodily form**. The Father declares His pleasure with the Son. While Jesus is the member of the Trinity who became flesh and died on the cross, we see in Luke's Gospel that all three members of the Trinity are actively involved in opening the way to heaven.

Jesus was a marked man after His baptism. He was marked as the target of Satan's temptation. He was also marked as the target of God's wrath. He was marked as the One who would open heaven for all believers.

Jesus endured the full fire of Satan's temptation. He endured not only the temptation in the wilderness, but Satan never really stopped tempting Jesus. He even tempted Him through His friends and followers. Jesus endured these temptations as we never will. Jesus' perfect perseverance under Satan's fiery temptation was part of the mission to open heaven for us.

In spite of the fact that Jesus never sinned, He was the target of God's wrath - a wrath that was so severe that Jesus cried out, "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?*" (Matt. 27:46). Jesus suffered the original baptism of fire in our place. He fulfilled John's prophecy of baptism by fire in order to open heaven for us.

Jesus blazed a trail through death that leads to life. He conquered death and rose from the dead. Through His triumph, the way to heaven is open.

Here at His baptism, Jesus took our place under the burden of our sin. As our Substitute, He carried out God's plan perfectly. The mission that Jesus began at His baptism was successful. He opened the way - the only way - to heaven. He offers to join us to Himself through baptism. The Holy Spirit gives us the faith to receive that offer. God the Father adopts us into His family by that faith. When the time comes for us to leave this world, the heavens will open, the angels will carry us home and we will hear the Father say, "**You are My Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with You.**" Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Lord God, heavenly Father, we praise You that You have revealed Your will and wisdom in the life of Your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. We praise You that You have given us the gift of Your Holy Spirit in our baptism, and that in baptism You have acknowledged us as Your dear children. We praise You that in the baptism of Your Son in the Jordan You marked Him out as the Messiah, who would be our true representative, to fulfil all righteousness, and, as our substitute, to give Himself in sacrifice for our sin and death. We praise You that, as Jesus saw the heavens opened when He was baptised, You have assured us of eternal life, where we shall see Your heaven opened to us.

Through Your Holy Spirit renew the mind of Christ in us, and let it grow in us. As Jesus began His public ministry for us at His baptism, we thank You for the privilege of regarding our baptism as our commissioning to serve You. Make us ready to give ourselves sacrificially for others, as Jesus has done, in ways that glorify You.

In mercy care for the spiritual welfare of all our baptised children. Give us grace as parents to show Your will and way to those who have yet to learn all that Christ has commanded us, by faithful worship, love for Your Word, and the desire to walk in the ways of Christ at all times. Free us all from being like this world. Transform us inwardly, that all our thoughts, words, and deeds may reflect Your perfect will.

Bless those who are one in confession with us in the fellowship of Your Church. Pour out Your blessing and strength on the pastors of the AELC and ULMA, that they may preach and teach Your Word with warmth and energy, and let the light of Your Gospel shine to people in darkness. Bless the witness of us all to the power of Jesus Christ to save sinners.

Fill us with increasing zeal for the salvation of people who do not yet know Him as their Saviour, and for the extension of His kingdom. Send Your Holy Spirit to all Your people, to overcome weakness in Your Church, to remove all indifference, to cast out all fear of human beings, to reject the love of the world, and to banish all lukewarmness.

Grant that we may find strength in Your almighty power and daily care. Show Your mercy and goodness to the sick, the lonely, the bereaved, and the suffering. Teach them to cast their cares on You. Show them that You are not dealing with them in wrath, but in love, for Jesus' sake.

Look with compassion upon the parched ground and send us refreshing rain.

Help, heal, uphold, and strengthen us all, and in all things enable us to rejoice in Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, whom we adore, with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY
(THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD)

Isaiah 43:1-7

¹ Now, however, this is what the LORD has said, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: "Do not be afraid! For I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name. You are Mine. ² When you go through the waters, I shall be with you. When you go through rivers, they will not flood over you. When you walk through fire, you will not be scorched, and the flames will not burn you. ³ For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. I have given Egypt as a ransom for you, Sudan and Seba in exchange for you ⁴ Since you have been precious in My sight, you have been honoured, and I Myself have loved you. Therefore, I shall give other human beings in exchange for you and nations in exchange for your life. ⁵ Do not be afraid! For I am with you. I shall bring your descendants from the east and gather you from the west. ⁶ I shall tell the north, 'Give them up!' and the south, 'Do not keep them back!' Bring My sons from far away and My daughters from the ends of the earth! ⁷ Bring everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed and made!"

Romans 6:1-11

¹ Therefore, what shall we say? "Shall we go on sinning that God may be more gracious to us?" ² Certainly not! How shall we, who died to sin, live any longer in it? ³ Or do you not know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? ⁴ Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might begin to live a new life. ⁵ If we have been planted together with Him in the likeness of His death, then we shall be planted together with Him also in the likeness of His resurrection. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with Him, that our sinful bodies might be rendered powerless, that we might not be slaves to sin any longer. ⁷ For the one who has died has been declared free from sin. ⁸ If we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ because we know that, since Christ was raised from the dead, He will not die again. Death no longer has any mastery over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin

once for all, but the life that He lives He lives to God.

¹¹ So you too, reckon yourselves to be dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus!

Luke 3:15-22

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