

## Baptism of our Lord – Year C – January 9, 2022

Good morning, I am Pastor Patti Axel, Director of Evangelical Mission in the Southeastern Synod. I bring you the good news from Luke's Gospel, the third chapter.

### **Gospel: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**

### **Glory to You, O Lord**

15As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 16John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

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."

The Gospel of the Lord

### **Praise to You, O Christ**

Holy and Mighty Lord, you sent your Son to live among us and when he was baptized by John, you spoke your blessing upon him to get him started! Allow us to hear your blessings on us when we need encouragement and strength. Lead us by your Spirit so we know we do not walk alone! May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.

Remember back to a time when you needed a word of encouragement and got it - who spoke those words to you? What did they say that made you confident to keep going? Delmer Chilton shares a story from Fred Craddock's book, *Craddock Stories*. Fred Craddock is a darn good preacher and Professor of preaching and New Testament at Emory University's Candler School of Theology and was invited to preach at Ebenezer Baptist Church some time in the 1980's. The following is the story told by Rev. Craddock:

"Joe Roberts, the pastor, had invited me . . . and the service had moved to the point where I was to stand and speak. I'd moved to the pulpit and I had my New Testament (turned to Mark 8) . . . and was ready to read, when Joe Roberts, who was seated up there along with several other persons, began to sing. Just as I was going to say my first word, he started singing. "I feel much better now that I've laid my burden down," and then he sang some more. Then the associates started singing, and the musicians went to their instruments, the piano and the organ and the drums and the electric guitar, and the people started singing. I'm standing up there with Mark 8, waiting. Then, I suddenly realized, I'm the one up front, I'm the leader of this, so I started clapping my hands and singing. Then everybody stood up and started clapping their hands and swinging and

singing, and it was just marvelous. Then at a certain point the pastor, Joe Roberts, put his hand out, it got quiet, they sat down and I started preaching. I could've preached all day.

Afterwards I said to Joe, "Well, that kind of shocked me a little bit. You didn't tell me you were going to do that." He said, "Well, I didn't plan it." "Then why did you do it?" And he said, "Well, when you stood up there, one of my associates leaned over to me and said, 'That boy's going to need some help.'" (p.128)

I immediately thought, before I read further in Delmer's sermon - well, no kidding! Don't we all need a little help. That's where I stopped reading someone else's work and starting praying my own.

In my ordination service, I remember what I was asked to say in response to the petitions asked of me about life as a Pastor and preacher of the Gospel: I will, and I ask God to help me. In some services it says I ask God to help and guide me. Well yes, thank you - i can use all the help and guidance I can get, especially from God.

We don't know what Jesus was thinking. He was likely a little anxious about what lay before him. He was praying after he and the others had been baptized and Luke tells us that God might have agreed with Pastor Roberts' Associate and took that moment to send the Spirit to offer some blessing and then he says, the Hebrew equivalent of "You are my Boy, my Beloved; I am quite happy with you! The persons of the Trinity working together to save the world.

Before the same Spirit guides him into the wilderness, we get a glimpse of his family tree - All 76 generations - right up to God! There ya have it Jesus! You are rooted firmly in the line of the patriarchs, prophets and kings! You have good genes so go lead my people! I like to think of this genealogical reference as a reading of the great cloud of witnesses who support him and upon whose shoulders he is carried throughout his ministry.

Blessings are powerful things. Names are equally powerful and through our names we are blessed with heritage, family honor and direction. Jesus' name in Hebrew was Yeshua, which meant deliverer, rescuer, savior! Do you know what your name means? My given name, Patricia means noble, aristocratic. Growing up with two older brothers and a younger sister, i needed the confidence of knowing I was of noble stock to keep me standing tall. They clearly wanted to tell different story. When I was a month old, on my mother's 26th Birthday, I was baptized and another name was added to my identity - Child of God! Every time I think of that name, I know i have received a blessing like no other.

Just as God blessed Jesus with a visual and an auditory blessing, God blesses us with water and the word and pronounces us part of the family of God, the beloved community,

the Body of Christ. Being part of Christ's body we are marked with the sign of the cross on our foreheads and reminded that we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. We are blessed as our sins are drowned and we are raised up with Jesus to live eternally. The sign of the cross reminds us that we are met at the place of pain, sorrow, despair and death by the one who experienced all of that for us. Even when life hands us its worst, God is there to give us the best.

In the world we live in now, one fraught with conflict, anger, pain, death and fear, we hear a different message. We hear and start to believe the message of judgment and ridicule, powerlessness and unworthiness. Those words and names hang on us like old, wrinkly name tags. They are not useful but worn out. God invites us to the table; a table that grows longer and longer to fit every single one of us. We each have a seat with our name on it. We are named and claimed as God's own. The old nametags and robes are pulled off and thrown away.

In Jesus Baptism, we are re-clothed from on high with the robes of Christ's righteousness. We are grafted to the vine and we are welcomed into the family of God; the family that has room for everyone, every color, gender and sexual self identification, cultural background and ethnic identity. We are beloved and God loves us and is happy with us! Amen and Amen!