

Baptism of Our Lord

January 7, 2024 (Year B)



*You have been absolved from sin and come to grace...
in order to live a different life now and to abstain
from sins. To be baptized and yet to
remain in sin makes no sense.*

– Martin Luther –
Sermon on Baptism

PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

Genesis 1:1–5

The Hebrew word *ruach* is one that has a varied depth of meaning in the Scriptures. Usually translated as “spirit,” it is often used to refer to “wind” and “breath” as well. The word is also used in Scripture to describe a state of emotion, both positive and negative (as in the phrase: “He was sad, so we tried to raise his spirits with some humor”). Here, in this text, the word refers to the Holy Spirit of God.

- *Why is it important to be aware that many words in the biblical languages often do not have a single direct counterpart in our language? How do overlapping meanings help us understand the breadth of a concept and how it was understood by people of Scripture?*
- *What emotion do you sense in verse 2 when it says: “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (calm, excitement, anticipation, restlessness, peace, etc.)?*

Though it may be more subtle than in the Gospel story of Jesus’ baptism, we who are Christians can see a reference here to the three persons of the Trinity at work: in the Voice, the Word, and the Spirit.

- *Why is it important for us to remember that the Triune God is eternal, and that all three persons were present from the beginning? What does that say about the divine nature of Christ?*

Psalms 29

The psalmist sings of the “voice” of the Lord — describing it as majestic and powerful. This same Hebrew word, *qhol*, in the Scriptures can connote a spoken call or message, as well as a loud noise or sound that is made.

- *How many times in this psalm is the phrase “voice of the Lord” written? What do you suppose is the aim of the psalmist in repeating this so often?*

There are certain pitches of sound that the human ear cannot detect. Sounds that are infrasonic are tones too low to hear, and ultrasonic are those that are too high to hear. Dogs can hear the high notes, for instance, and whales can hear very low frequencies of sound.

- *Is the voice of God something that we all can hear? Compare Paul’s description of Jesus’ voice in Acts 22:6–9. Why do you think Paul could understand and the others couldn’t?*
- *How does one discern the voice of God versus the voice of the enemy? (See Galatians 5:16–26 for a clue.)*

Romans 6:1–11

Paul said that we are “baptized into Christ’s death.” Buried along with him. One of the hardest things to embrace about our walk with Christ is that we are called to die to ourselves in order to live with him. Our natural instincts of self-preservation are hard to overcome; we are hard-wired to survive! That’s how God created all animal and plant species — find a way to survive to pass on the genetic material to the next generation and keep the creation going.

But here, in this life of faith, we are called to willingly die to ourselves so that we might live a new life. How do we overcome that natural urge to live life as we know it? By the power of the Holy Spirit living in us. Plain and simple, we have to give up our own will so that Christ’s will can take over. This is the way of death to the old self and new life in Christ Jesus.

- *In what ways have you struggled to let go of sin and the temptation toward things that are not life-giving? How has God acted to take those desires away from you so that you might live in Christ?*

Paul suggested in this section of his letter that rather than sin more to receive more grace from God, it is important to see that sin is incompatible with a life in Christ Jesus.

- *Some faith traditions say that once we are baptized we never sin again. How is that different from what Paul is saying here? Who empowers us to live free of the control of sin in our lives?*

Mark 1:4–11

Mark does not tell the story of Jesus’ birth; instead, he begins the story with Jesus as an adult, being baptized by John in the River Jordan. Here, the voice of God breaks through the clouds, proclaiming that Jesus was and is the “beloved Son” of the Father.

- *From the text in Mark, is it clear which people heard this message? Was it Jesus only, John as well, or all those around? Compare Matthew 3:17 and Luke 3:22. What difference might this make, if any?*

According to verses 12–13 that follow this lesson, immediately after the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit thrust him into the wilderness for forty long days of temptation.

- *In what ways are we, as followers of Christ, thrust into the wilderness after our baptism? What is it in our baptism that gives us the strength and faith to face the trials of life?*
- *In what sense is Baptism the true beginning of our life in Christ?*