

Baptism of Our Lord B  
Anointed for Ministry

January 7, 2023  
Mark 1:4-11

Jesus' baptism marks the beginning of his public ministry. All four gospels tell us about Jesus' baptism. It's also mentioned in Acts and Romans. Only the gospels of Matthew and Luke tell us about Jesus' birth. For some of the biblical writers, Jesus' baptism was more important than his birth. Perhaps we should make our baptisms a more important part of our lives.

Since 2007, I've had the congregations I've served affirm their baptisms on this Sunday. This year it is extra special as Solveig affirms her baptism with the laying on of hands. The tradition at Christ Lutheran has been to hold confirmations on Pentecost, which, this year, is May 19. We decided not to wait until May, since she has completed all her studies.

We also decided to use the Pentecost color of red for this Sunday, rather than the traditional white, since the confirmands receive red stoles. We've also left the tree up past January 5 – the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas. It was fitting for Vicki William's memorial service yesterday. Sometimes it's OK to break some traditions.

There are connections between Jesus' baptism and the Pentecost event. In both events the Spirit comes in a visible form. There is the dove at Jesus' baptism. There are tongues of fire at Pentecost.

At Jesus' baptism there is the heavenly voice. In Mark it only speaks to Jesus, but we overhear these words: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

At Pentecost, heavenly voices were given to all the believers as they proclaimed God's mighty deeds in languages the foreigners could understand. We don't know what they were saying. We are told: "All were amazed and perplexed."<sup>1</sup> Some concluded that these Christians were filled with new wine. They were wrong.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit doesn't always guarantee success. Right after his baptism, the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness where he is tested by Satan. The Pentecost event led people to misinterpret the actions of the believers.

However, after the misinterpretation, Peter gives a sermon in his own language. That sermon convinced thousands to welcome the message and be baptized. (None of my sermons have had quite that effect.)

Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of his public ministry. Pentecost marked the beginning of a new ministry of Jesus' followers – they would continue Jesus' work without the earthly presence of Jesus. He had ascended back to heaven before Pentecost.

The Book of Acts tells how the gospel was spread beyond Jerusalem to the ends of the earth under the power of the Holy Spirit.

We also see in the Book of Acts how the ministry and spread of the gospel moved beyond the chosen Twelve to other believers. Peter and to a lesser extent, John, two of the twelve, are key figures in the first part of the book, but we also see Stephen and Philip spreading the gospel. They were not part of the Twelve, but two of the first deacons. The second half is nearly all about Paul. Sometimes he is with Barnabas, sometimes with Silas, sometimes with Timothy. We are introduced to Apollos, who is instructed by Priscilla and Aquilla. A number of other people are also named. None of these later folks were part of the original Twelve. They were not hand-

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:12

picked by Jesus. They were ordinary people who were baptized and filled with the Spirit to carry on Jesus' ministry throughout the world.

The ministry that Jesus began after his baptism, became the ministry of all of his followers after Pentecost.

As part of the rite of Affirmation of Baptism, you again make the following promises:

"Do you intend to continue ... to *proclaim* the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to *serve* all people, following the example of Jesus, and to *strive* for justice and peace in all the earth?"

Proclaiming the gospel in word and deed is not just the calling of the ordained, but of all the baptized. Serving others in the name of Jesus is not just the calling of the ordained, but of all the baptized. Striving for justice and peace for all people is not just the calling of the ordained but of all the baptized.

However, to be well-equipped to do this, you also promise to live among God's faithful people, and to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper. You promise to receive what God offers you so that you are equipped to go and minister to others in his name.

These are promises that Solveig has studied and will make today. These are promises that you also are making today.

You promise to take in what God gives you through the word of God, the Lord's Supper, and the fellowship of believers. You promise to share what God has given you through proclaiming the good news through your words and through a life of serving others and striving for justice and peace in the world.

You are the baptized people of God. You are ministers of Christ's good news.

Jesus' baptism prefigures Christian baptisms. It was something different than the baptisms John had been doing. This is pointed out clearly in our Second Reading. John's baptism for the forgiveness of sins was not quite the same thing as Christian baptism.

The events of Jesus' baptism shows us the meaning of Christian baptisms. There was the voice of God. There was the coming of the Spirit. We believe a similar thing happened at your Christian baptisms. God declared to you: You are a beloved child of God. You were filled with the Holy Spirit. It was more than just washing away your sins, it was an adoption by God. It was an empowerment by the Holy Spirit. It was God making a claim on you and your life. It was the beginning of your life of ministry in Jesus' name – even if you were never ordained.

I imagine most of you had the laying on of hands at your confirmation as we will do with Solveig this morning. Some of you may have been given a stole as Solveig will receive. A stole is a symbol of being yoked with Christ for service in the world. Some of us perform our service as ordained ministers serving in a congregation. Most Christians perform their service as lay people working in the world.

You might have referred to your occupation as a vocation. "Vocation" comes from the Latin for "a calling." It can make quite a difference in your thinking if you consider it not a job, but as your ministry in the world. Even retired people without a job, can look at their different activities as ways they minister in the world.

I read about a garbage collector who saw his job as a ministry. He saw his job as much more than just picking up garbage. It was a ministry. He was making his community cleaner, healthier, and safer for all the people living there.

Throughout our lives, we continue to return to our baptisms. Martin Luther said that we

should return to our baptisms every day in repentance. It is recognizing that we have sinned, and, at the same time, reminding ourselves that we have been claimed as God's own beloved children; that God keeps taking us back when we have disobeyed or wandered off on our own paths. This love, acceptance, and forgiveness of God that we sinners have experienced is the message that we believe. It is the good news that we've been empowered to share with the world. It is our baptismal calling to carry on the ministries in Jesus' name.