

Sermon - 01/09/22
Ps 29; Is 43:1-7; Acts 8:14-17; Lu 3:15-17, 21-22
Baptism of the Lord

There are two sacraments of the United Methodist Church. Last Sunday we celebrated Holy Communion. Today we commemorate Holy Baptism. This is the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Just to be clear in terms of history, Jesus was a Hebrew. He received the ceremony of the Bris (Brit Milah) eight days after He was born. That is, He was circumcised. He was baptized when He was about 30 years old. The God-man Jesus Christ received the waters of baptism. Let's just pause and appreciate His humility. The Ruler of the Universe submits to baptism? Why?

Jesus was there when the Holy Spirit hovered over the primordial waters. The Father said, "Let there be light, and there was light." (Gen 1:3). The Son of God participated in that creation event. As a man of flesh and blood, He fulfilled all righteousness by being baptized. Circumcision is covenant in the flesh. Baptism is covenant in the soul – in the heart. Jesus said, "Don't think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill." (Mt 5:17) So He has, in every way, including His baptism.

In our day, we keep the sacrament of Holy Baptism because Jesus showed us that it is good and right and holy to perform this outward sign of the inward grace of God.

Our Scripture lessons for the day don't emphasize the water of baptism. Water is mentioned, of course. John Baptist says that he baptizes with water. But our anointing – our consecration into God's covenant – our transformation is by fire. Water stands for cleansing. The purifying is done in the fire of God's glory – God's presence. No wonder Jesus was always saying, "Do not be afraid" and "Peace be with you. Facing fire is scary. The writer of Proverbs reminds us: "A crucible for silver, and a smelter for gold, and the LORD is the tester of hearts." (Prov 17:3 CSB) In both the crucible and the smelter the precious metal is heated so impurities can be removed. When Moses saw the bush that burned but was not consumed, he removed his shoes – he bowed down and worshiped – but he was not burned as with the fire of earthly combustion – rapid oxidation. The fire of God's presence purifies but does not destroy.

Let's return to the day of creation. The writer of Genesis says: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." (Gen 1:1-3) Time had not yet begun.

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Eternal Father: When nothing existed but chaos, you swept across the dark waters and brought forth light. In the days of Noah you saved those on the ark through water. After the flood you set in the clouds a rainbow. When you saw your people as slaves in Egypt, you led them to freedom through the sea. Their children you brought through the Jordan to the land which you promised.

**Sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Tell of God's mercy each day.

In the fullness of time you sent Jesus, nurtured in the water of a womb. He was baptized by John and anointed by your Spirit. He called his disciples to share in the baptism of his death and resurrection and to make disciples of all nations.

**Declare Christ's works to the nations,
his glory among all the people.

Pour out your Holy Spirit, to bless this gift of water and those who receive it, to wash away their sin and clothe them in righteousness throughout their lives, that, dying and being raised with Christ, they may share in his final victory.

**All praise to you, Eternal Father,
through your Son Jesus Christ,
who with you and the Holy Spirit

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lives and reigns forever. Amen.

The waters of creation will not overwhelm you.

No flood will overwhelm the world – by the promise of the rainbow.

The Lord will make a way through every river that cannot be crossed. God makes a way where there is no way for His people to follow Jesus Christ even into the New Jerusalem. Amen.