

# ***THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD***

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

The people of Israel had been looking for a long time for a Messiah whom the prophets had said would save the children of God. This promised Messiah would lift up the down trodden, rescue the righteous and punish the unjust. The Messiah, the Saviour, would be Emmanuel - “God with us”.

When the people saw John the Baptizer, they thought they had seen their Messiah. John spoke fiery words of judgment against the unjust. He inspired the people, even publicans and prostitutes, to repent. He spoke of the reign of God coming upon the people. It was obvious that God was with him in a powerful and real way.

But, as we know, the people were mistaken. Sure John resembled the Messiah, but there was one difference - a big difference. John baptized with water, but the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire! What John did, represented the coming of God into people’s lives. Jesus would bring the real thing!

So the people kept looking and Jesus came. In the midst of John’s ministry, Jesus heard the call of His Father to leave His life as the carpenter in Nazareth and begin His earthly ministry, which would eventually, as we now know, lead to His death. And so Jesus joined the crowd of people coming to be baptized, not to repent of His sins, but to turn from His old life and begin a new one.

Luke tells us that after Jesus had been baptized He was praying

and the heaven's opened and the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus.

The Spirit was like a dove. It was the Spirit, but the only way that Luke could describe it was that it appeared like a dove in bodily form. It wasn't just some ghostly image, it was real and had substance to it.

Then God's voice came from heaven and said, "You are my Son, the beloved; with You I am well pleased". God was affirming in Jesus who He was and confirming His call to ministry.

Let us take a look at these events we heard in our Gospel today.

The people are looking for a Messiah and wondered if John might be the one. John tells them that the Messiah will baptize them with the Holy Spirit. When the Messiah does come God sends the Holy Spirit upon Him as He calls Him into service.

It is important to notice the role of the Holy Spirit in all of this.

John the Baptist says that the Holy Spirit is the real thing. The Messiah will pour out the Holy Spirit upon them. Then when Jesus has been baptized, John's prophecy begins to be fulfilled.

God pours out the Holy Spirit on Jesus, and claims Jesus as his Son.

The church has a reason to set aside a special day to focus on Jesus' Baptism. We focus on it because it is an example of how God calls us to ministry, a ministry that the church refers to as the ministry of the baptized, and how we should respond to that call. When Jesus heard His Father's call to ministry, He responded. He turned to the way that God was calling, He turned from His old life. It is only slightly different for us.

When we realize that God is calling us, we have to turn from our old lives. The only difference is that, unlike Jesus, our old lives include sin.

When Jesus turned to God, His Heavenly Father poured out the Holy Spirit on Him. In the same way when we turn to God, He

pours the Holy Spirit upon us. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a topic that some Anglicans feel uncomfortable about.

Some people like talking about the Holy Spirit, but their lives do not demonstrate the presence of God. There are hypocrites who act in extreme ways to appear holy, and then end up serving only themselves. Some denominations define the outpouring of the Holy Spirit only in terms of certain gifts. They argue that if we do not speak in tongues we are not a Christian. They say if we are uncomfortable with their forms of worship, we must not have the Holy Spirit like they do.

But, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is an important part of our Christian faith. Jesus came to baptize us with the Holy Spirit and with fire, to pour into our hearts and souls the real living presence of God. That is what the Holy Spirit is. It is God's living presence in the midst of our lives, and it is what enables us to be real for God and the world.

It is very simple. If we dedicate our life to following and serving Christ, then we have the Holy Spirit. If we have experienced that peace that passes understanding, faith and hope in times of trouble, the ability to love where we couldn't before, then that is the Holy Spirit at work in us. The Holy Spirit does not necessarily cause us to engage in extreme behavior.

Sometimes, however, the Holy Spirit does lead us to extreme behavior like loving the unloved and forgotten of our society. That is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Finally when Jesus had been baptized and the Spirit was poured upon Him, God claimed Him as His own. In the same way God claimed us as His own in our baptism, with the sign of the cross, and that means something. For Jesus it was an affirmation of His ministry. In the same way our membership in the Family of God through the Sacrament of Baptism is an affirmation and

confirmation of our ministry. We can go forth in faith knowing that the Holy Spirit of God who dwells in us, is greater than all the powers of evil in this world.

We are sons and daughters of God by virtue of our Baptism.

Therefore the questions facing us are simple. Is God real in our life? Is God substantial in our existence? Do we know the fire of the Holy Spirit burning in us? Does Jesus live in our heart, and does that give us peace and strength and hope and love?

And, finally, are we real and genuine for God and the world? Consider Jesus' baptism and follow His example. Allow Him to flood our soul with His Spirit. Then, recalling the promises of our Baptism, let us go forth into our community and our world, and live like the children of God we are!

**AMEN.**