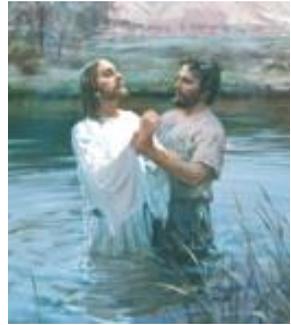


Sunday 13th January 2019

The Baptism of Christ

Epiphany 2

White



Collect

Eternal Father, who at the baptism of Jesus revealed him to be your Son, anointing him with the Holy Spirit: grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit, that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Acts 8:14-17 English Standard Version (ESV)

¹⁴Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

COMMENT: The Philip of the passage immediately preceding this story (8:4-12) who baptised the converts is not one of the Apostles, but a deacon and evangelist. He was one of several Greek-speaking Christians appointed to help the apostles. (Acts 6:1-6) He had been forced to flee from Jerusalem after the death of his fellow evangelist, Stephen. This brief note points to a subtle development in the early church's understanding of baptism and the special role of the Apostles, and their successors the Bishops and Presbyters. Theologically, Baptism may be performed by any Christian, although in the regular practice of the Church, this is undertaken by an authorised person, usually a Priest or Deacon. Confirmation on the other-hand, in the historic Church, has been restricted to Bishops and Priests. In the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, a Bishop may Confirm, or a Priest may Confirm but with oil blessed by a Bishop (Chrismation). In the Anglican Church, this is restricted to a Bishop.

Luke 3:1-17, 21-22 English Standard Version (ESV)

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

¹⁵ As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, ¹⁶ John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; ^[a] with you I am well pleased.” ^[b]

Footnotes: a. or *my Son, my (or the) Beloved*. b. Some manuscripts *beloved Son; today I have begotten you*.

COMMENT: Luke gives a much briefer account of Jesus’ baptism than do the other gospels. It seems little more than an ending to his narrative about the ministry of John the Baptist. The essential details are the same. Luke records the actual baptism, the descent of the Spirit as a dove, and the divine blessing. There are, however, some significant aspects to this brief narrative. Baptism was common in the Jewish tradition and ritual bathing had great symbolic meaning for priests, Levites and Pharisees. If you were a gentile and wished to become a Jew, you were baptised. John preached repentance of sins and baptised those who responded, thereby acknowledging their sinfulness and being immersed in water as a sign of their cleansing. To the pious but arrogant Jew, John’s call was an insult - it was tantamount to saying they were not Jews and needed to become Jews! Jesus felt the need to identify himself with all the people whom he intended to bring into a similar intimate fellowship with God. His messianic role had become that of a mediator. In other words, this one act symbolised his solidarity with all humanity and also his mission. The act also forms a kind of ordination for Jesus’ ministry. One embarked on, his first challenge was facing temptation in the wilderness. The moment had come for him to commit himself, to move out into a wider community than his carpenter shop in the small village of Nazareth. Henceforth he would make known to whomsoever would listen what was involved in a life lived totally within the reign of God’s love, to live in such a way that people would see that Israel’s messianic promise could only be fulfilled in such a totally committed life.

Psalm 29 *Afferte Domino* Grail Psalter

℟ The Lord will bless his people with peace.

¹ O give the Lord, you sons of God,
give the Lord glory and power;
² give the Lord the glory of his name.
Adore the Lord in his holy court. **℟**

³ The Lord's voice resounding on the waters,
the Lord on the immensity of waters;
⁴ the voice of the Lord, full of power,
the voice of the Lord, full of splendour. **℟**

⁵ The Lord's voice shattering the cedars,
the Lord shatters the cedars of Lebanon;
⁶ he makes Lebanon leap like a calf
and Sirion like a young wild ox.
⁷ (The Lord's voice flashes flames of fire.) **℟**

⁸ The Lord's voice shaking the wilderness,
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh;
⁹ the Lord's voice rending the oak tree
and stripping the forest bare. **℟**

^{3b} The God of glory thunders.
¹⁰ In his temple they all cry: "Glory!"
The Lord sat enthroned over the flood;
the Lord sits as king for ever. **℟**

¹¹ The Lord will give strength to his people,
the Lord will bless his people with peace. **℟**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: Have you ever stood in a safe place to watch the beautiful violence of a thunderstorm? Such an experience like that lay behind this early hymn of praise celebrating God's powerful presence in nature. Many elements drawn from the common, primitive cosmology of the Near East have found their way into this song. Divine victory over chaos determines the natural processes of creation according to the LORD's command and

provides for human security. The LORD's glory visible in the storm forms the central theme of the psalm. The psalm opens with a summons to "heavenly beings" to offer their praise and worship to the LORD. The realm where the LORD reigns was conceived as a temple with heavenly beings robed like ministering priests. As the storm develops, the psalmist hears thunder rolling across the sky as the powerful yet majestic voice of the LORD (verses 3-4). A violent wind sweeping down from the Lebanon mountains breaks great cedar trees as they roil and skip. These too he sees as the direct action of the LORD (verses 5-6). Lightning becomes another expression of the LORD's voice (verse 7) and the thunder which follows rolls across the whole length and breadth of the country as far as the wilderness of Kadesh in the Negeb desert (verse 8). All of these details form a vivid description of how the LORD controlled the chaotic forces of nature. So the LORD "sits enthroned over the flood ... as a king forever" (verse 10). After a violent storm like this all the wadis gush with raging floods as the water is carried away for several more days. Few as such violent storms may be in the relatively benign climate of Palestine, storms do occur in winter. One such storm wreaked havoc in parts of Israel and Jordan in February 1998. Yet the rainfall from such storms is essential to the growth of crops and so the psalmist saw this storm as a blessing which would yield welcome security for the people. Nature had spoken of the LORD's strength and greatness, the infinite source of spiritual blessings.

Short Preface

And now we give you thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord, whose willing submission to the way of righteousness is the pattern of our calling to be his people and live in his way.

Post Communion.

Lord of all time and eternity, you opened the heavens and revealed yourself as Father in the baptism of Jesus your beloved Son: by the power of your Spirit complete the heavenly work of our rebirth through the waters of the new creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Blessing

May God, who in Christ gives us a spring of water welling up to eternal life, perfect in you the image of his glory; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**