

The Baptism of Our Lord. Year-B. The scripture text is taken from Mark 1:4-11

Today, we heard about Jesus' baptism and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Him. John the Baptist proclaimed Christ's superiority by distinguishing between His own baptism with water and the baptism that Christ would provide by the Holy Spirit.

Several Old Testament passages speak of the Holy Spirit being poured out like water. Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit, supplies us with supernatural power just like the Holy Spirit revealed its supernatural power at Jesus' Baptism.

All three members of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, were present at Jesus' baptism. The parting of heaven was a foretaste of both Jesus' statement in Mark's Gospel, chapter 1, verse 15 in which Jesus says: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."

Jesus birth, ended the separation of God and man, that was created when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, (original sin). And of course through Jesus' death on the cross, the shedding of His blood, and His resurrection over sin death, and the devil, the promise heaven, of life eternal, has been given to all believers. So now, we have the promise of the resurrection as well.

The Holy Spirit changes things. It works through Jesus to bridge the gap between us and God. Reconciliation with God was possible because of Jesus' birth, ministry, death, and resurrection.

Not only was this gap first bridged at Jesus' baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended from heaven like a dove, it was also bridged at his death when the veil in the temple was torn in two.

If we could have seen the Temple in Jerusalem in Jesus' day the temple was divided into several sections, including the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies, was separated from the rest of the temple by a heavy and large curtain.

The only person who could enter this particular part of the temple was the high priest, and even then, he could only enter it on the Day of Atonement.

No one else could enter, so a rope was tied to the high priest's waist, so that if anything happened to him, he could be removed without anyone else having to enter.

God claims us through baptism. In the waters of our baptism, God speaks our name, unites us to Christ, and grants us the promise of a new life.

God says that He loves us, and He claims us as His own. Nothing else is needed. No one can take our new identity in Christ away from us.

No matter what other names, we are called by others or even by ourselves, we are now beloved children of God.

In our Baptismal Liturgy, we read: "Through Baptism God has made these new sisters and brothers, members of the priesthood we all share in Christ Jesus, that we may proclaim the praise of God and bear his creative and redeeming Word to all the world."

Baptism tells us that we are deeply rooted in the possibility toward goodness. That is a revelation to us.

It goes against the stain of original sin, which I mentioned earlier. It encourages to take a risk by going into this unknown territory.

God offers harmony, peace, compassion, and justice, things that are alien to our world.

The scriptures tell us that Jesus was without sin, so why in the world would Jesus need to have been baptized.

Jesus said in Matthew Gospel, chapter 3, verse 15: "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness."

Jesus asked John to baptize him as an act of obedience to God's purposes. Jesus wanted to set a good example for us, by doing the Father's will.

His baptism also served to introduce Him to John, and the people of Israel, as the long promised Messiah.

Jesus' baptism was necessary in order to fulfill the requirements of the Old Testament law, which required repentance from sins, hence John the Baptist's baptism of repentance.

Jesus had to be baptized because He was born and died under the law, to deliver us from the law (which was so strict that it could not be obeyed perfectly).

The Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus at His baptism commissioned Jesus for a unique service. Jesus carried the Holy Spirit wherever He went and gave it to those who were receptive to His message.

When the Holy Spirit comes upon us, we are empowered to do God's work in the world.

Jesus was God's answer to Isaiah's prayer that God would come down to earth and be fully present with humanity.

He was and is, God's Son in a way that others in God's image are not. Jesus is the Son of God, but His baptism gave Him the verbal assurance that He was indeed God's Son.

Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit, but His baptism gave Him the visible assurance that the Holy Spirit was certainly present with Him.

Jesus' baptism gave Him the positive assurances that He would need during His temptation, His time of ministry, His suffering and His death.

We long for someone to tell us the truth, even if it will hurt us, God created this longing in our hearts.

We long to have someone who can help us understand what is going on in the world and what we need to do.

If we go the Holy Scriptures, the Prophets of the Old Testament spoke the truth of God's Word. Jesus and John the Baptist, also spoke the truth. They spoke of the need for repentance, and repentance is the first step in a journey that leads us to baptism by the Holy Spirit.

It requires us to change our direction. In other words, we have to turn, or burn. Baptism is the second step in the journey.

Baptism means a burial with Jesus and the resurrection to a new life in Christ. Baptism with water is a symbol of the washing away of the dirt of our old sinful life.

Forgiveness of sins is the third step, it is ushered in by our baptism and our repentance. When God forgives us, He wipes our sinful slate clean.

He takes His big bottle of Liquid paper or His big roll of correction tape and crosses out the mistakes of our lives, just like the father forgave His wayward son in the parable of the prodigal son.

Jesus' baptism, ushered in a new way of dealing with sin. People did not have to go to the temple in Jerusalem because, Jesus became the new temple.

Repentance is not something we can do only once in our lives and then it is forgotten. Repentance must be done each and every day, because each and every day, Satan will try to get us to move in a different direction, away from God and towards self.

Baptism with the Holy Spirit allows us to see ourselves as gospel peace-makers in our world. It allows us to be merciful to those who ask for forgiveness.

It allows us to speak for those who can't speak for themselves the poor, the hungry, the oppressed, prisoners, and so on. It allows us to spread God's love to everyone.

When I was preparing this message, I found a story, about a mother who was at home, with her two young daughters, one lazy summer afternoon.

Everything seemed to be just fine until the mother realized something strange. The house was quiet. And as every parent knows, a quiet house in the daytime can only mean one thing: the kids are up to no good.

Quietly walking into each of the girl's rooms and not finding them there, she began to get worried. Then she heard it: The sound of whispering followed by the flushing of a toilet.

Following the sound, she soon realized where it was coming from. It was coming from her bathroom. Whispers, flush. Whispers, flush. Whispers, flush.

Poking her head into the bathroom, she was able to see both of her daughters, standing over the toilet. Whispers, flush.

One of the girls was holding a Barbie doll by the ankles, and the other girl, had one finger on the handle.

Whispers, flush. Wanting to hear what her daughter was saying, she slipped quietly, into the room. Whispers, flush. And this is what she heard: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and in the hole you go." Flush.

We know what it feels like to have life, grab us by the ankles, and dangle us over the waters of chaos. And we know that this happens in spite of our faith.

We even know that, at times, it happens precisely because of our faith. When this happens, we can take comfort in the knowledge, that because we have been baptized with the Holy Spirit, we have the strength we need to face life's challenges. God is with us, we are not alone.

Baptism, means that God has broken through the barrier between Him and us. In return, we are to break through the challenges and problems of the world with everything we have been given by the Holy Spirit.

Saying yes, to our baptism, means saying, "yes", to facing the challenges of our world and yes, to a life, torn open by God's love.

Saying yes, to our baptism means that our sins have been forgiven and we have been given a new start in life through Jesus Christ.

As soon as He was baptized, Jesus was on the move, and that fits in with the urgency of Mark's Gospel.

We have a similar calling. We are baptized for action. We are baptized to go out into the world and to be the hands, the voice, and the presence of Christ, with a sense of urgency.

We are baptized for the sake of others and for the sake of the world. As baptized believers, as we walk out of this house of worship and go back to our homes, and as we begin our work week, remember, you are "baptized", let us be bold and faithful in our calling, so that one day, as we stand before Christ, we will hear these words: "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Amen.

Let us pray:

Loving God, You sent your Beloved Son into this world, to take on human flesh and blood, to live among us, to teach people about your love for us, and to die on the cross, so that our sins would be given, and through the resurrection of your Beloved Son, the promise of eternal life is now ours. Lord God, remind us, that through our baptism into Christ, we have died to sin, and have been raised to a newness of life in Him. Give us a sense of urgency to go out into the world, and to proclaim the gospel not only with our words, but our deeds as well. As disciples of your Beloved Son, give us the strength, the courage and fortitude to be good and faithful witness as we live our lives, looking forward to the Day of Christ glorious return. All these things, we humbly pray, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.