

Jan. 9/2022

LUKE 3:15-17, 21-22

Today is the baptism of the Lord. I wish I could say that I had planned Landry's baptism for today, however that isn't so. It may be a coincidence, but I'd like to say it is a God-instance. God knew in the great scheme of things how to orchestrate this... Just as God knew in the great scheme of things how to orchestrate the birth of Jesus and everything leading up to it. John the Baptist was leading people to repentance, so they are ready to follow Jesus is where our reading began today.

The story of John's birth was a miracle, an angel announced his birth; his father wasn't happy about it, questioned the angel, and lost his ability to speak until the day of John's baptism when he declared, "His name shall be John," following the angel's guidance.

While his mother was carrying him, she had a visit from a distant cousin, Mary, who was experiencing a miracle of her own: she was carrying the son of God. The first time Elizabeth saw Mary she said the baby in her womb leapt in recognition of the Messiah. Even before he was born John knew his purpose was to proclaim the Messiah. And that's what we heard him doing when today's reading began.

The people were excited, here was an eccentric man, he lived in the wilderness, ate honey and locusts, and wore roughly woven camel hair with a leather strap tied around his waist... could he possibly be the Messiah? John was humble enough to decline that title. "I baptize with water, the one coming after me baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Isn't it strange that we link fire to the realms of the underworld? Fire and brimstone preaching used to be the way to get people to convert because they didn't want to burn for eternity, yet here John is saying Jesus baptizes with fire?

Fire is reminiscent of the Pentecost scene with the disciples receiving the Holy Spirit like flames touching them. Is that the only other place baptism is joined with fire? I believe it is.

We know that fire is a purifier... if we hold something in the fire the impurities will be burned out.

Perhaps John is speaking of something more than we expect at a baptism of water and the Spirit in these modern times, ... Perhaps John is explaining what he means when he speaks about wheat and chaff and the threshing floor. The separation has already taken place, the full shaft of wheat has been thrown into the air and the grain and chaff have been separated. The heavier grain falls directly to the ground while the chaff, the lighter part of the stalk, is blown away.

John says that the grain is being stored for future use and the chaff, the part that is no longer useful because it has no nutritional qualities, is going to be burned. Could it possibly be that John the Baptist is referring to the day of judgement even before Jesus' formal ministry has begun? That Jesus will separate those who have proven their weight from those who haven't? Is this what John means by a baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire?

Then we find out that Jesus is baptized along with all the persons who were there with John. Why is Jesus even being baptized? We know he is the son of God, he has nothing to repent as do the others who stand in line to be baptized. Yet Jesus stands in line right along with them, he begins his ministry right where he concludes it, in the midst of sinners.

Jesus' baptism shows us that he stands in community, he identifies with being human and belonging.

After his baptism Jesus prays and God answers by sending a visible dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit which alighted on him for all to see. Then God speaks saying, "You are my Son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased."

The baptism of Jesus is a public event. People see the dove descend. People hear the voice. The kingdom of God has grown, just as the kingdom of God is growing today with the baptism of Landry.

Through this we learn that our faith isn't all about us, it's about community, it's about being the family of God.

We show up for the baptism, but God is doing the work of the Spirit. Baptism pulls away the curtains of the world, allows us to see ourselves as created in God's image. We are designed to live in God's love.

It's not just about me, it's not just about you. It's not just service unto others, it is love and service to the entire creation. We are called to act in love toward our self, others, and all of creation. Love and forgiveness; the reality that God will bring us into our real selves in ways we otherwise can't realize... As baptized children of God are we going to live into that?

John publicly affirms he is who God has created him to be. Jesus goes into the waters of baptism to publicly affirm that he identifies who he is with whom God has made him to be. With a baptism in the church, we recognize the person's place in God's family. We agree with them that they are God's and God is theirs. Our unity as God's eternal family is celebrated.

It is not a coincidence that we welcome Landry into the family of God today, God has plans, and in the fullness of time, at the right time, God fulfills those plans.

All glory be to God.