**1/12/25**

**Baptism & Perspective**

**Vicar Vince Piekarski**

**Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 (NRSVUE)**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSVUE) (2) **Amen.**

Good morning, and welcome to all of you. Thank you for joining us here on this cold and snowy Sunday. I know that we all are not very accustomed to so much of the white stuff and the bitter cold down here in South Jersey. I know that it being icy and so windy as of late has had many of you staying home and staying safe, and I don’t blame you. This yet again is one of those many times that I am extremely thankful that we still have the technology and programs hanging around following all of that time we were unable or unsteady with being around one another during COVID. We are definitely blessed to be able to have service in a hybrid manner, and be here in-person and over the conference call. The good thing is that no matter how we all are present all that matters is that we are here, and that we are able to worship together as we are called to do. So, I thank you all for making the commitment to join us. I thank you all for calling in and continuing to show up time and time again.

Now, if I happened to be a betting man, then I would bet that many of you out there on the conference call or in these pews here probably do not even remember your baptism. I would venture that you were probably a baby, and to top it all of I would even bet that getting baptized was probably not even your choice. I am fairly certain that decision was made for you by your family and those that stood in as your sponsors. I am rather confident that there was a lot of joy, excitement, relief, assurance, pride, and even reassurance on that very day. I also know for sure that your parents, family, sponsors, friends, and the community in which you were baptized said the all too familiar words and made the very promise to raise you in the faith of the church as they also prayed for you.

Okay, so on that special day you may have cried, or then again maybe you had the biggest smile on your face, or just maybe you looked rather confused by all the people and things going on around you. I mean you were probably getting handed off like a football in your cute dress or awesome white outfit. Then, to top it all off you probably had water poured over your head, or perhaps you were even immersed in it. You probably even received the light of Christ as a candle was given to you and held by someone there with you. You probably had a Pastor make the sign of the cross on your forehead with oil too. I mean there are so many things that seem to go on during the baptismal service. They of course have all of their significant points. However, there indeed is only one main purpose and reason for this service despite all these extra things going on. Our old self was being washed away, and we were putting on a new life in Christ as we were publicly identified as his own. He claimed us and made us new no matter what symbols or things happened during the service. What a need, and what a blessing for sure.

Now, if none of this sounds familiar to you, then you are probably of the rare few that may have had a completely different experience. You may have been baptized later in life because you never grew up in the church. You may have been baptized in life because the faith practice or your family felt that you had to be the one to make the choice, or just maybe you even had to be of a certain age. Then again, if you are newer to the church then maybe you never got to witness a baptism with your own eyes. However, if you do not have stories from family and friends, or if you did not have a baptismal experience at all then please feel free to speak to me at any time. We do believe that this is a vital step in the life of the faith, and not because we are acting or doing “for God, but rather (it is) something the Holy Spirit does to us through the water and the Word, not matter what our age, in order that we may trust in God and not ourselves.” (11)

Alright, as we move along here on this very topic of baptism, I find it rather cool how serious Martin Luther took the very sacrament. Believe it or not he actually took the time and made the effort to translate the service and the words into German so that the community of believers back then could really take part and understand what they were saying. He wanted to ensure that people were not just going through the motions, but that they were really committed and planning to do what they said in the life of a new child of the faith. Martin Luther believed that we should “consider that it is no joke at all to take action against the devil and not only drive him away from the little child but also hang around its neck such a mighty, lifelong enemy.” (11) Believe it or not, Martin Luther so serious about this that he would even yell at Satan while outside of the church doors before the sacrament of baptism began. In his notes on baptism that we all can become familiar with in the Study Version of the Small Catechism, I actually find his last words and prayer rather important. So, let me share them with you here. “Ah, dear Christians, let us not value and treat this unspeakable gift so half-heartedly. For baptism is our only comfort and doorway to all of God’s possessions and to the communion of all the saints. To this end may God help us. Amen.” (11) What a doorway and what a gift for sure! Thanks be to God for that!

So, in our Gospel Reading you will see that there are indeed two confirmations of who Jesus is during this work up to and during his actual baptism. The very first one comes from John who we have heard from and a lot about over the past few weeks here and there. John the Baptizer confirms that there is indeed one coming after him that is greater than he. John confirms or goes as far as to say that he is not even “worthy to untie the straps of his sandals.” (2) John further confirms that Jesus will give even more than he is giving with his baptism of water and repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John says that “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (2) We know the Holy Spirit will come along on this journey, for it is vital for all three aspects of our Triune God to be present moving forward. However, it gets even deeper, and possibly even a bit confusing as we get some good ole farming terms in relation to this fire. Mind you that this focus on fire does not have the typical focus on refining that we would like, but it is one of burning that which is of no use or no good. For when you pick up a fork and throw wheat in the air it will indeed separate. The good stuff will fall in one pile and the bad stuff will blow and gather in another pile. The good stuff will then be gathered in and stored for use. The bad stuff will be gathered and burned. Now, one can look at that in various ways in comparison to us as humans here on this earth. No matter how we look at it though, we definitely want to make sure that we do not end up in the wrong pile and marked for the “unquenchable fire” (2) spoke of here at the end of our days. John the Baptizer and the words we have heard confirm that we must always make it a point to recenter and refocus on God. We must consider it a blessing that Christ has even considered us worthy for baptism and to be part of his family. Mind you that he considers us so worthy that he went to the cross, and was raised from the dead for you and for I to ensure that we can live a life and have an option to never have to even get close to that “unquenchable fire.” (2)

Alright, enough about paragraph one and the first confirmation of who Jesus really is. Let’s really get into the thick of things here in the second paragraph. If you have not questioned a time or two when hearing this reading in a service or even reading it over at home why exactly Jesus even had to be baptized then I would be shocked. Why would a man with no sin, a man that actually is God, have to do the very same thing that you and I have to do?!?! This is where I always say that I love the very fact that Christ came to this earth in human form to make the story that much relatable and identifiable. He always wanted to set the very best example by doing exactly what he expected of us as he was modeling what should be done. He was living out the very promises that were marked in the scriptures. The ultimate confirmation of who Jesus is comes as we hear the voice from heaven state in our last verse today, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” (2) There was no more question as to who he was or whose he was. In the very waters of baptism that question is no longer as we have confirmation and revelation for ourselves as well.

We not only get this second confirmation, this very truth, but we get some rather important and even awkward points as well. I mean there is no hidden agenda that Jesus loved talking to his father, and it immediately said that he went to pray. He set the very example, and he made it a point that in everything he did he prayed. We all need to be more mindful of this, and take this action more often. Jesus did it all the time, and we need to follow that example. Secondly, we get this business of a bird being the Holy Spirit. The dove is utilized here so that we have some kind of imagery, and not just some kind of magic or a thing we cannot picture. God knew that we as humans always have to put something into that good ole proverbial box. So, we get a dove, and we utilize that very imagery to this very day. This very dove, this very symbol of the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus and became one with him. This very symbol, the Holy Spirit, this advocate, is there with you and I each and every step of the way following our baptisms and every single day and moment. Thanks be to God for that, and thanks be to God that we have the best example put forth in the very image and likeness of his Son that we would undoubtedly know what to do, and how to do it. We all have been redeemed. We all have the very opportunity to be water washed and reborn in and through him. Baptism is not just some silly event, it is life altering and life changing, it is vital to our faith and identifying who and whose we are. Yes, we may have to deal with Satan the rest of our lives, but we are doing so with the very protection and love that we would not have otherwise if we did not call on and accept the Lord as our Savior and purpose and reason for being in this very life.

**Amen and Amen.**

**References & Study Points**

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 Baptism of Our Lord

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 Paul Scott Wilson

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 Is this the same fire with which Jesus will baptize?

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 Commentary on Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

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 Baptism of Our Lord (Year C)

 On the Baptism of Jesus, a lot of preachers and worship planners encourage

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 A matrix of family stories and questions

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 Baptism of Our Lord (Year C)

 Before we plunge into the Baptism of Jesus, it’s worthwhile to step back and note

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 Baptism is not a Resolution, but a Revelation

 Saturday, January 11, 2025

 Chris Halverson

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**Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 (NRSVUE)**

The reading opens with questions about the identity of the Messiah. John the Baptist insists that he is not the Messiah; instead he points ahead to one who is coming. And whether the voice of God was heard by all or only by Jesus, God settles the matter: Jesus is God’s beloved Son.

15 As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 16 John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. 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 granary, 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 heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”