

Epiphany 1C  
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22  
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### Leading a Baptism Life

It's the season of Epiphany, a time when we recognize the manifestation of Jesus, when we begin to see more clearly who Jesus is because of the events and actions that take place in his life. Epiphany begins with the story of the three wise men from the East, who followed the light, the star, to Bethlehem, and presented gifts to an infant child who had been born to shepherd the people of Israel.

And today, the first Sunday after the Epiphany, we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus. Interestingly, today's gospel actually contains no details of Jesus' baptism. Unlike the gospels of Mark and Matthew, Luke includes nothing about John actually baptizing Jesus. Matter of fact, there are three verses that are skipped in today's lectionary reading, and they have to do with John being locked away in prison by Herod. All the emphasis in Luke about Jesus' baptism is about what follows after he is baptized, about what it means to lead a baptism-life.

To lead a baptism-life.

First, Jesus prays. And while Jesus is praying, the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. These particular words are heard only in Luke: the Spirit descending on him in "bodily form." Something remarkable, something tangible has taken place, a transformation that is visible, as Jesus embodies the Spirit. The Spirit physically dwells within him, and can be seen, can be recognized, through Jesus actions, his life, and his ministry.

Then there's a voice from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." While Jesus is praying, when he's taking the time to make himself fully available to God, he hears God's voice.

This description of the Spirit descending on Jesus after prayer should remind us of the Book of Acts, when the disciples are gathered together in Jerusalem, devoting themselves to prayer, and the Holy Spirit comes to them like a rushing wind, appearing like tongues of fire.

Luke wants us to make these connections. Jesus prayed, and the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form. Believers prayed, and the Holy Spirit came in a form that could be both seen and heard, strengthening and enabling Christ's followers to proclaim and act in new and remarkable ways.

As Christians, we too are all called to lead a baptism-life: to pray, to listen, to open ourselves to receiving the transforming gift of the Spirit.

Several years ago, I attended a rector's forum at St. David's in Roswell, to hear about a mission trip to Honduras. The team, all adults, had returned from their first mission trip, which had taken place during Holy Week. They showed pictures of where they'd been, their work-site, and the people they had met. But towards the end of the presentation, one particular team member

stood up and told us that she needed to tell a story about how the Holy Spirit had changed her life.

Connie shared that although she has lived in Atlanta for many years, she was still really, as she put it, a yankee — skeptical about people's motives and always on the look out for someone trying to pull things over on her. So when she had heard, while in Honduras, how helpful it was for team members to leave behind extra clothing, especially their work boots, she was more than a little skeptical.

After all, how many pairs of boots did these people need? If every team left boots behind, didn't that mean that these workers actually had many more boots than they could ever use? So what were they doing with them all? And besides, men's feet were bigger than women's, so it really didn't make sense any sense for her to leave her boots behind. So what, if the rest of the team was! She wasn't going to be taken advantage of. And besides, she liked her boots. They were new and comfortable, only worn during this trip and she was going to keep them.

But thoughts about those silly boots had nagged Connie all week long, even in her dreams, and those thoughts wouldn't leave her alone. At one point, she said had even prayed, "God, if you want me to leave these shoes, you're going to have to REALLY show me." The last work day came, although everyone else brought a second pair of shoes to the job site, Connie arrived with only the shoes on her feet.

At the end of the work day — the team, the workers, and several families — all walked a short distance to the local chapel to worship together before the team headed back to the guest house to pack and depart the next day. It was Maundy Thursday, and just like here, there came a time in the service for foot washing. Connie removed her boots, had her feet washed, and returned, barefoot, to her seat. She sat there quietly, praying, eyes looking downward, seeing her bare feet, and the bare feet of those sitting around her. All her brothers and sisters in Christ.

But soon she began to really see. And then she stared. For the feet of the person next to her, the worn, bruised, and calloused feet of the worker sitting at her right side, were exactly the same size as her feet. Exactly the same size. In prayer, in silence, she had listened. That nagging voice in her head was gone, and she tearfully handed her boots to the man next to her. He tried them on and they fit perfectly.

With God's help, Connie had opened her heart, and she was willing to look differently at how she could serve Christ and love her neighbor. And she explained that she was trying to bring that new openness here, trying to see things differently, by looking beyond those old assumptions that had always filtered her views, and instead seeing what is around her, at home, through fresh eyes.

A baptism-life is a prayer-led life, open to listening to God. Open to being transformed by the Spirit. It's a life nourished at this table, a life of humbly recognizing our human frailties, and seeking and giving forgiveness. It's a life that acts, proclaims by word and deed, the Good News of God in Christ.

There's nothing easy about a baptism-life. There's nothing here about keeping the status quo, or staying comfortable, not rocking the boat or being polite. A baptism-life is revolutionary, demanding that we open ourselves to new possibilities in Christ, that we think about our

priorities and loving God first, by pledging ourselves to seeing Christ in others and caring for our neighbors as ourselves.

We'll soon be standing together, renewing our own baptismal vows as part of today's celebration of the Baptism of our Lord.

As we say together these words, pray about these promises. Listen to the stirrings of your heart. How is Christ reaching out to you? How can you use your unique gifts to live into your baptismal covenant, with God's help? Could there be something new, a different way, that you are called to care for others? or to be more daring in striving for justice and peace? Are you opening yourself, through daily prayer, to the transforming gift of the Holy Spirit

Living a baptism-life isn't easy, but through prayer and an open hearts filled with the gift of the Spirit, we can find the courage and strength to share God's love with a world that is waiting.