

## “Baptized for a Purpose”

Date: January 10, 2015

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Luke 3:15-17,21-22

Occasion: Baptism of the Lord

Theme: Baptism, service, spiritual gifts

Today we remember and celebrate the Baptism of our Lord Jesus. Jesus was baptized for a purpose. Jesus was not baptized for the forgiveness of sin; he was sinless.

Jesus was baptized as a kind of commissioning service. When a king was to take over a throne, he was anointed with oil. Jesus is likewise anointed, not with oil but with water. Jesus was baptized for a purpose – to serve others and to demonstrate the height and breadth and depth of God’s love. He died to show us that.

The baptism of our Lord is the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Up until this point in his life he was the town carpenter. But all that time spent studying the scriptures with the scholars in the Temple led him to the realization that he was the Messiah.

For 30 years he stayed at home, following his father’s trade. But now he must begin a new phase of his life, doing the work of His Heavenly Father. Jesus was baptized for a purpose. He had a very specific work that he was called to do.

Listen to what he understood his mission to be. (Read Luke 4:18-19). When Jesus finished reading that passage in the synagogue he put the scroll down and said, “Today that passage has been fulfilled in your hearing.” *That’s me. That’s my mission.*

You and I were also baptized for a purpose. Certainly one reason for baptism is for the remission of sins. We understand the waters of baptism to have a cleansing, healing, forgiving property to

them. But there is another meaning that we should never forget. You and I are baptized for a purpose also.

We too are baptized into a ministry of service to others. Ministry is not the sole domain of the clergy. All baptized Christians are ministers. The waters of baptism serve as a blanket ordination service for every self-professing Christian.

We are baptized into the service of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Only a few will be called to the ministry of preaching and celebrating the sacraments and leading a church. But every Christian is baptized into the ministry.

At his baptism, Jesus is anointed with water and receives the Holy Spirit. Luke makes that point, not to claim that this is the time when Jesus became divine. Luke affirmed that reality back in the birth narratives. Jesus was Lord at his birth. But at his baptism, the Holy Spirit comes to EMPOWER the servant for his ministry.

Jesus left the Jordan River and began his ministry. He healed the lame. He gave sight back to the blind. He forgave the woman at the well. He set free the woman caught in adultery.

He healed those with leprosy and the woman who had been bleeding for years. Jesus did all that Isaiah said the servant of the Lord would do. The Scriptures were fulfilled in Jesus.

Jesus was baptized for a purpose – to serve God and others. That is part of the meaning of our baptism as well. Now, you and I are not called to be the Savior of the world. The Messiah has already come and his name is Jesus, amen?

God does not expect you and me to be the Messiah. That's why God sent us a Savior, because we could not save ourselves. But

even though we are not called to be Messiah, we are called to imitate Messiah, and how he served others.

You and I are baptized for a purpose – to serve. As our little humorous skit portrayed this morning, you can serve anywhere. You can serve others at home, in the workplace, in the marketplace, on the highway. And you can also serve in the local church.

We all have different gifts and graces, different talents and abilities. God wants us to use those talents in His service, each and every one of us. Some are called to sing and others are called to audit the finances of the church.

Some are called to teach and others are called to visit the sick and the homebound. Some are called to care for the homeless and others are called to be generous in their giving. Each of us has a gift or a talent that we can use to serve others, wherever we are.

The church council set some new goals for the church, and they asked me to share some of them with the whole congregation, because we need people with very specific talents, and some with very generalized talents. Let me share a few with you.

The health ministry team is looking for volunteers to offer rides to people of our church – rides to church or rides to the doctor's office. After our worship service, health ministry team members will be passing out a talent surveys to see if you might be interested in this way of serving, or in some other.

Council thought that it would be a great idea to host Bible studies in people's homes this year, and we're looking for volunteers to host and facilitate a group. Support and guidance will be offered of course. We also want to be more disciplined in our prayer life – and

prayer is definitely a way of serving others. So, we're looking for volunteers to host small groups who gather for the purpose of praying. Maybe the prayer groups could be combined with the Bible studies. Who knows? That's up to you – the servants of God.

We would really like to do another Rock the Park event this summer, in late August. We need leaders to help make this happen, though. That event was a signature ministry of Lakewood UMC for several years. The community knew us because of that.

We'd like to host another one-time event, a summer block-party, that specifically targets young people, to coincide with Unified Erie's effort to let people know that one hour of religious activity per week makes a difference in young people's lives. We've talked about that already. Rock the Park in August, we need leaders.

The Council would really like to build on our electronic outreach ministry – doing things like Live-Streaming, Twitter, posting the audio recordings of the worship service or sermon on our website. But here's the thing – we need someone who has the gift or the interest in technology and media skills. Anyone like that, out there today?

All of the church council goals were printed in this month's newsletter, which you can access on our website if you didn't get one in the mail. But here's the bottom line – we are all baptized for a purpose, which is to serve.

The ministry of the church does not belong to a few, but to all. We can serve anywhere we are, using the spiritual gifts that God has given us. We just need to be open to hearing God's call. Are you listening? Are you available, to let God use you? Amen.