

January 7, 2024
Baptism of Jesus

Meditation: “Pickled, or just all wet?”

Water. Water figures prominently in three of today’s lessons. In Genesis the Spirit of God hovers over the waters, or the wind of God sweeps over the face of the waters, or the breath of God moves over the face of the waters. In the Psalm, the voice of God thunders over the waters, and God is enthroned above the waters. In Mark’s gospel both Spirit and voice come together when the Spirit of God descends to the waters and a voice from the heavens announces that Jesus is God’s beloved, in whom God is well pleased.

To the Jewish people, water represented chaos; it was uncontrollable. It also represented life. Out of the primordial waters came all of creation, all life. Out of the waters of the womb came Jesus, and each of us. Out of the waters of baptism comes new life, a life lived in union with God.

Water is so important. Without it we would surely die. We are drawn to water. We love to see the sun rise or set over the water. We love to hear the sound of water babbling in a stream, or lapping at a shoreline. We are awestruck by the power of wind-whipped waves crashing on a shoreline. When I was young, we had the opportunity to swim in the ocean. Have any of you ever swum in the ocean? It’s different than swimming in a pool or a lake. You are more buoyant in the salt water. Yet when we got out, all we were was wet. But if you take brine – salt water and a little vinegar – and put a cucumber in it, and leave it for a spell, it becomes a pickle. All I got from salt water was wet, but a cucumber becomes something else. I was just all wet, a cucumber is transformed into something else.

Quiz:

1) A sacrament is:

- a) a scary dream
- b) bread and wine
- c) a means of making God come to us momentarily
- d) a means by which we become aware of God’s grace, ever present and waiting for us to be open to it.

2) Baptism is:

- a) completely free
- b) will cost you everything

3) John's baptism was:

- a) a cleansing for weary travelers before they entered Jerusalem.
- b) an act of ritual purification
- c) an act of conversion from another religion to Judaism
- d) an act of repentance for the forgiveness of sins

4) Jesus was:

- a) a sinner
- b) the new Adam, who was created with all else from the waters of Creation
- c) the new Moses, who was drawn from the waters of a river
- d) entirely without sin

If Jesus was without sin, and if John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, why was Jesus baptized? Why did Jesus need to be baptized? What else was happening?

Moment of decision.

Jesus knew from an early age that he had a purpose to his life. He knew that he had a different relationship to God than others. In Luke's gospel we hear the story of Jesus at the age of twelve. During the Passover celebrations in Jerusalem, his family went to the temple. After the festival was over, the family left, but Jesus, stayed behind, studying. When his family discovered him, three days later, they were upset. Mary asked him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been searching for you. We've been worried sick." And Jesus answered, "Why were you searching? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" He was aware of a special relationship, but it was not yet time. When John appeared in the wilderness, it was time for Jesus to commence his ministry.

Moment of identification

With all of the irrational fear in the world today we might think that a moment of identification has to do with us; who we are; proof of identity. The Holy Spirit came down like a dove on him, and a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved." Can you imagine if that happened to us at a border crossing or a curfew check as proof of who we are? The voice from heaven clearly identified Jesus as God's son, but that is not what I mean here by identification. What I mean here is that Jesus is identifying with God, and more specifically, that Jesus is identifying with God's mission, to bring about the kingdom, the realm, the dominion, the nation of God. For the rest of his life, Jesus' main purpose is to bring people to know that God's grace is available to them, and that God wants all people to live lives of joy in peace, the peace that can only come from all people being treated fairly.

Moment of equipment

That's an overwhelming task. It is a major commitment. In fact, it's a commitment that we no one, not even Jesus, is able to keep on their own. So how was Jesus able to make and keep that commitment? Right, the Holy Spirit that descended upon him at his baptism.

The water of the Jordan made Jesus wet. The Holy Spirit changed Jesus' life. It equipped him with the strength, the wisdom, the courage, and all the other things he needed to fulfill his ministry.

The question I have for you is, are you pickled, or just all wet? Did something fundamental change at your baptism, or did you just get wet? Most of us were baptized as babies, because our parents realized that there is something in life, regardless of their love, their efforts, and their bank accounts, that they could not give us. They stood as helpless as a child in the face of God. They were unable to give that sure and certain grace they desired for their children. They acknowledged that only God can supply the grace they wanted for their children. And so too for us and our children. So, the answer to the question, did something fundamental change at your baptism, is of course it did, for the Holy Spirit was present at your baptism as at Jesus'.

I hear you. You want a sign. You want evidence. You want proof. All you have to do is look at your life. In our baptism our parents made a promise on our behalf, and at our confirmation we took up that promise on our own, a promise that we would be Christ's students, that we would follow in the way of our saviour, that we would resist oppression and evil, that we would show love and justice, and that we would witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ. In baptism, we take upon ourselves, or on our children, the work and life and ministry of Christ, which is the work and life and ministry of God. We identify with, commit to God's goal of bringing about a world where there is righteousness, justice, fairness for all. These promises are contingent upon God's help; "I do, with the help of God," our parents said at our baptism, and we repeated at our confirmation. We can do that only if God is ever present in our lives, waiting for us to ask God's help. Truly, this is the grace of God, that God is with us, always. Our relationship with God is not left entirely up to us. In baptism, we get wet, yes, but we are also transformed. In baptism we are incorporated into the body of Christ because of the gracious work of God. Thanks be to God.