

Baptism of Our Lord

Genesis 1:1-5

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

³And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Psalms 29

¹ Ascribe to the | LORD, you gods,*

ascribe to the LORD glo- | ry and strength.

² Ascribe to the LORD the glory | due his name;*

worship the LORD in the beau- | ty of holiness.

³ The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; the God of | glory thunders;*

the LORD is upon the | mighty waters.

⁴ The voice of the LORD is a pow- | erful voice;*

the voice of the LORD is a | voice of splendor.

⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the | cedar trees;*

the LORD breaks the ce- | dars of Lebanon;

⁶ he makes Lebanon skip | like a calf,*

and Mount Hermon like a | young wild ox.

⁷ The voice of the LORD splits the flames of fire;

the voice of the LORD | shakes the wilderness;*

the LORD shakes the wilder- | ness of Kadesh.

⁸ The voice of the LORD makes the | oak trees writhe*

and strips the | forests bare.

⁹ And in the temple | of the LORD*

all are | crying, "Glory!"

¹⁰ The LORD sits enthroned a- | bove the flood;*

the LORD sits enthroned as | king forevermore.

¹¹ The LORD shall give strength | to his people;*

the LORD shall give his people the bless- | ing of peace.

Acts 19:1-7

19 And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland^[a] country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. ²And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." ⁴And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." ⁵On hearing this, they were baptized in^[b] the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. ⁷There were about twelve men in all.

Mark 1:4-11

⁴John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son;^[c] with you I am well pleased."

Message: What happens to Jesus, happens to us!

In the ancient world, images of water played an important theological role. While gentle streams and still waters spoke of refreshment and life itself, there was also a darker side. Mighty thundering waters, the destructive power of the sea, and the sweeping devastation of floods were symbolic of chaos and evil. When Jonah was literally drowning in the ocean's depths he spoke of the deep that closed in upon him.

But the violence of chaos is not to be outdone! Our Genesis text describes for us the Spirit of God hovering, brooding above the deep. This was no gentle whisper – this is the very Word of God in a powerful voice that thunders over chaos and evil. It is a voice that splits the flames of fire and shakes the creation to its core.

The Voice is heard again at the baptism of Jesus. And again it is no gentle whisper. Mark tells us that the heavens opened, but the verb he uses quickly dispels any notion of dainty disclosure! The word Mark uses is *σχιζομένου*. Literally it means to tear open or tear apart. It's where we get our word schism. The heavens were torn apart as the Spirit of God came down. We can get a sense of it if we apply it to the act of opening a gift. It can be carefully unwrapped thus protecting the packaging, or it can be eagerly ripped apart like a child at Christmas!

This one will never be mended or closed again! The Holy Spirit has ripped apart the heavens in order to come down. God is on the loose, the Lion of Judah has shredded the boundaries and He's not going back!

It is interesting to note that the pronouncement God the Father makes Christ Jesus. "You are my beloved Son;^(a) with you I am well pleased." This is significant because in view of what the Scriptures tell us Christ's mission is, he hasn't done anything yet!

As recorded in all the gospels, the Baptism of Jesus marks the very beginning of his ministry and mission. As of this moment, he has not performed any miracles; he has not preached a single sermon or told a parable. He has not raised anyone to life nor healed the sick, and yet coming up out the waters of his baptism, the Father declares that he is well pleased.

This is crucially important, because since the earliest centuries of the church, Christians have believed that what happens to Christ Jesus happens or will happen to us! This scene at the Jordan has nothing to do with what Jesus

has done for the Father; it's about what God the Father and the Holy Spirit has done and is doing to him!

We are not inherently pleasing to God! God does not make any such proclamation about us based on what we do or have done either! We are not by nature Children of the Heavenly Father! We are all born children of a fallen humanity. In the waters of baptism, we are reborn children of God and inheritors of eternal life!

A marvelous aspect of Jesus' baptism is its remind that he is not only our Lord but also our brother. He was baptized, just as we are. He shares in our humanity. Although Jesus is Son of God *par excellence* and our Lord, he is not these in a selfish way that hoards the Father's inheritance for himself. We do not need to envy him in the way that Joseph's brothers envied Joseph, because Jacob favored him. Rather, just as Joseph's humiliation (by his own brothers!) and exaltation (God made Joseph "Lord" of Egypt) ultimately led to the brothers' sharing in Joseph's bounty, so God's making Jesus Lord through his death and resurrection and his giving of the Holy Spirit make us co-inheritors with him of everything that the Father has to give his children, above all, eternal life. There is also a reminder, of course, that our baptisms call us to conform our lives to Jesus, and to live our lives under the cross., for we will not be glorified with him unless we suffer with him.

The Old Testament reading from the creation story in Genesis was selected to accompany this gospel reading because Mark's gospel is about new beginnings. Mark writes of Jesus' baptism under the heading of the "beginning" of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This word recalls Genesis 1:1-5, the Old Testament lesson for the day. "In the beginning," God's Spirit once hovered over the waters, while God spoke and called heaven and earth into being. So also at the baptism of Jesus, God's Spirit came over the waters and his voice declared Jesus to be his Son. That was the beginning of a whole new creation. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, which his baptism already foreshadows, the new creation is fulfilled. For us, we are baptized into Christ, and we all have the possibility of sharing in the new creation that Christ brings. Through baptism, we have all been reborn. In Christ, and in our daily return to our own baptisms, there is an inexhaustible source for the renewal and new beginnings of our lives.

Jesus' baptism is fulfilled in his death and resurrection, and what happens to Jesus happens to us! We who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death! We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united

with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Thanks be to God!