

SERMON

+ Baptism of Our Lord C

January 12, 2025

We haven't wasted any time
going from Jesus' birth
to his adulthood and the beginning of his ministry
with the story of his baptism.

But Luke doesn't tell us much
about the baptism itself, does he?
The way Luke tells the story,
it's as if Jesus is just another member of the crowd
that comes out to John in the wilderness
to hear him preach and to be baptized.

Luke doesn't make a big announcement about it.
It's a subordinate clause –
“...and when Jesus also had been baptized...”

That doesn't sound like a major announcement, does it?
It even puts Jesus' baptism in the past –
like it's already happened and we missed it –
which means that it's not the main action of the moment
that Luke wants to tell us about.

Actually, at first, the attention isn't even on Jesus;
it's on John.
And surely, someone who preaches the way he does
and stirs up crowds the way he does,
and calls people to change their lives the way he does
would appear to be the long-awaited messiah of God.

It was an age ripe for a messiah.
These were people eager for a messiah
who would deliver them from Roman control
and establish God's reign among them again.
And John is acting the role of the prophet
as well as anyone they had read in the scriptures.

But for all the detail Luke gives us
about him and his preaching,
we know he's not really the focus of Luke's story
because, as you know,
John is not the long-awaited messiah of God.

John himself would have none of it;
he knew his role.
He was the voice crying in the wilderness
making way for the one to come.

He was the one proclaiming judgment
and calling the people to right living,
so that they'd be ready
when the real messiah made his appearance.
John was not the messiah,
but the messiah was indeed on his way.

It meant that a new age was beginning.
And that is partly the point
of Luke's story of Jesus' baptism
and why he tells his story the way he does.

We know, of course, that it's Jesus
who is the long-awaited messiah of God.
We know it because we know the story.
We heard it from Luke from the beginning.

We heard it back when Gabriel made the announcement
to his mother, Mary.
You will name him Jesus, [which means "he saves"]. (1:31; Mat 1:21)
The child to be born will be holy;
he will be called Son of God,
Son of the Most High. (1:32, 35)
The Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David...
and of his kingdom there will be no end. (1:33)
That is messiah talk, plain and simple.

But the people in Luke's story don't know that.
They weren't at Mary's side

when the angel made his announcement.

They weren't on the hills
when the angel announced his birth to the shepherds.
They didn't hear any of the announcements about Jesus
the way we readers and hearers of Luke's story have.

So to the people in the story itself,
Jesus appears to be just another face in the crowd
baptized alongside everyone else,
just the way Luke reports it:

"...When all the people had been baptized
and when Jesus also had been baptized
and was praying..."
And that's when Luke tells us the real action of the moment
that he wants us to know –
the part about Jesus that makes him unique
among all those other baptized people.

"The heaven was opened
and the Holy Spirit descended on 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.'"
There it is: Jesus is the messiah of God, the Son of God,
the holy one John has pointed to all along.
And it's God who declares it.

This is the pivotal moment of history
when the proclamation of God's word to the world
passes from third-party priests and prophets, like John,
who say, "Thus says the Lord,"
to the very presence of God's Son,
born on earth as a human being,
who says, "Truly I tell you."

This is a re-setting of time.
A new age begins
in which God's Son comes to God's people directly,

as one of them,
in this newly baptized young man
filled with the Holy Spirit
and declared and claimed to be the beloved Son of God.

We – you and I – live in this new age.
We live in this age of the messiah –
in this kingdom age –
with the present Son of God
living and speaking to us
whenever we gather in his presence
as he has promised.

And we – you and I –
are baptized with the same baptism
of water and the Spirit and God's holy Word.
Like Jesus, we – you and I –
are filled with the Holy Spirit of God
and declared and claimed to be
beloved children of God.

What happened next for Jesus in Luke's version of the story
was that the Spirit that lighted on him in the form of a dove
led him out into the wilderness of temptation.

And confirmed in his identity,
fortified by his time there,
and in the power of the same Spirit,
he went from there out into the world
teaching in the synagogues,
bringing good news to the poor,
proclaiming release to the captives,
recovery of sight to the blind,
letting the oppressed go free,
and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor.

The way Luke tells the story,
Jesus saves people by undoing the ways of sin and suffering
that came to be the ways of our fallen life after creation.
Jesus brings to all people

the ways of this new age – a new creation –
in the presence of God in him
and the power of the Spirit through him.

And, just as Jesus left that riverbed
to go into that dangerous and tempting world
and bring the ways of God's kingdom to all people,
so our baptism in the water and the word
sends us out in the power of the Spirit
to be the living body of Christ
present for our own age and world.

It is our calling
and, by the power of the Spirit, our authority
to bring the ways of this new age –
the ways of God's reign among us –
to all the people of our own time,
telling them the good news of God's action in Jesus
to save us:
to be present with us,
to love us, to heal us, to forgive us,
to restore us, to free us,
to make us his children,
and to bring us into his kingdom,
of which there will be no end.
Amen