

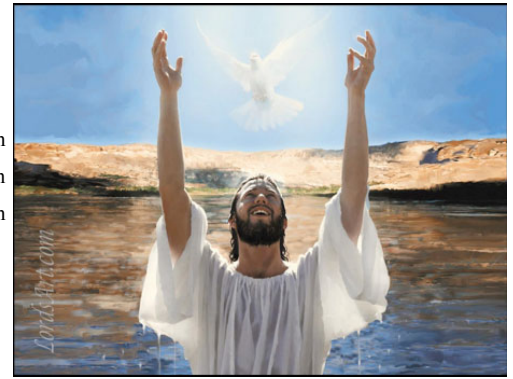
Isaiah 41:1-7

Psalm 29

Acts 8:14-17

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

The Baptism  
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## THOU ART MY BELOVED SON

Luke 3:15-17. *As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ, <sup>16</sup>John answered them all, “I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. <sup>17</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”<sup>1</sup>*

- *As the people were in expectation ...* (v.15). Use verses 3, 7-9, and 10-14 to explain why the people were *in expectation*. Today many are “in expectation.” Some expect a better world through science and education; some expect visitors from space, or world peace. And some expect the return of Jesus Christ.
- *... and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John ...* (v.15). When people *question in their hearts*, they are trying to decide what to believe. Discuss Mark 2:5-12 for example, where Jesus asked in v.8, “*Why do you question thus in your hearts?*” What things you have “questioned in your heart” in this way?  
Considering the ministry of John the Baptist, why would the people ask, “Could John be the Christ?”
- *... John answered them all* (v.16). John's answer to the people in v.16 was, in a word, “no.” How did John contrast himself and his baptism with Jesus and his baptism? After Jesus had risen, he charged the disciples not to leave Jerusalem, saying, “*Before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 1:5). How did the baptisms of John and Jesus differ in their effect on those disciples who received both?
- “*His winnowing fork is in his hand ...*” (v.17). As John was preparing the way of the Lord, there was a great sense of urgency in his message. In this illustration, Jesus is the thresher and he is ready to go to work. He is the owner of the threshing floor and all its contents. He has come to separate the wheat from the chaff. He will keep the wheat and burn up the chaff.

A similar analogy was used by Jesus in the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43) to show the separation of the righteous from the wicked. There are things to notice in these illustrations:

- (1) The wheat and chaff begin life together. They grow together and are harvested together.
- (2) If it were not for the thresher they would remain together – a mixture of the useful and the useless.
- (3) In the threshing, the wheat and chaff are tossed together in the air. The wind drives away the lighter chaff. The heavier wheat falls to the threshing floor. In the psalms we read, “*The wicked are like the chaff which the wind drives away; therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment ...*” (Ps 1:4-5). In other words, the judgment men must face is like a strong wind – it will drive away the wicked.
- (4) The *chaff* are those lacking in faith and drawn away into temptation. James 1:6 says, “*He who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.*” Paul wrote that we must heed the teaching and prophecy of the apostles and prophets, *so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles...* (Eph 4:14). There is a vivid picture here of (1) the faithful remaining together, anchored in Christ and shielded by faith, and (2) those without faith being like chaff – *carried about with every wind of doctrine*.

<sup>1</sup> Bible quotations are from the RSV.

Many winds are blowing in our time, pushing this way and that. In the Episcopal Church we are especially aware of this. Different voices within our own church teach different doctrines. Which do we heed? Our founders accepted the Bible as the supreme doctrinal truth: “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.” (Articles of Religion, VI - BCP, p. 868).

(5) Finally, *wheat* and *chaff* are different. The only thing they have in common is their origin. They grow up together, but when the thresher comes, they must part. They have different destinations, and when they part, they will never see each other again. Let us pray that none of those we love are parted forever from us in this way, when the wheat is separated from the chaff.

Luke 3:18-20. *So, with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people. <sup>19</sup>But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother’s wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, <sup>20</sup>added this to them all, that he shut up John in prison.*

- *He preached good news to the people* (v.18). John spoke of wrath and judgment. He called people *vipers* and said they had to *repent* (Luke 3:7-9). What was the good news? It was this: *Repentance* would result in *forgiveness* and *cleansing* from sin. Messiah had finally come to save his people.

King Herod could agree with John’s message that all should repent, except in his own case. Not a few of us are like this today. And being king, Herod had the power to shut John up, which he did.

Luke 3:21-22. *Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, <sup>22</sup>and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, “Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.”*

- *When Jesus also had been baptized and was praying ...* (v.21). If we had only Luke’s account, we would not be sure *when, where, how, or why* Jesus was baptized. Read Matt 3:13-17, and discuss these matters.

Jesus was sinless. He had no need of repentance or cleansing from sin. Why did he go to John to be baptized? John tried to prevent him, but Jesus said, “*Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*” (Matt 3:15). What did he mean? After his baptism, Jesus immersed himself completely in every phase of human life. He identified himself with us. There is no part of your life – good or bad – that Jesus does not understand as one who has participated with you in all things.

- *... the heaven was opened ...* (v.21). More than the other gospels, Luke emphasized the *results* of our Lord’s baptism. First, *heaven was opened*. The gates were opened, and the great river of grace began to flow from the throne of God into a dying world.

- *... and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove* (v.22). There is an objective reality in Matt 3:13-17, in Mark 1:10-11, and here in Luke. It is as if each writer seeks to convince the reader that on that day, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, it was something real – something people saw and possibly heard. The Spirit landed gently, as a dove lands with wings outstretched to soften the impact.

Jesus always was the Son of God, and always will be. What change, then, came upon him in this descent of the Spirit? What ended, and what began? Can you identify anything like this in your own life?

- “*Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased*” (v.22). Two OT passages are similar to this saying. The first is Ps 2, a psalm about Messiah’s triumph over rejection. Verse 7 says, “*I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you.’*” Some think this verse prophesies and confirms the ministry conferred on Jesus through the Holy Spirit at his baptism.

The second reference is in Isa 42:1, “*Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations.*” This verse begins Isaiah’s prophecy of God’s servant, on whom he has laid the iniquity of us all (Isa 53:6).

God spoke these words to his Son, who would become the human expression of his great love, and take upon himself the sins of the world, and, finally, bring an end to suffering and death. He spoke to Jesus, but he wanted the whole world to hear his words: “*Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.*”