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THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Slide #2

On the First Sunday after Epiphany, we celebrate the baptism of Jesus. **(Click)** But as I understand that it was very dry in Texas and the southwest this past summer. **(Click)** How dry was it?

- (Click)** 1. The Baptists are starting to baptize by sprinkling;
- (Click)** 2. The Methodists starting using wet-wipes;
- (Click)** 3. The Presbyterians were giving out rain-checks;
- (Click)** 4. The Catholics were praying for the wine to turn back into water.
- (Click)** Now that's dry!

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One of the places we discover God most powerfully is in remembering our baptism. You know the story of Christ's baptism. John the Baptist was baptizing people in the River Jordan. People were flocking to hear him and responding to his invitation. **(Click)** Among those who came to John to be baptized was a young carpenter from Nazareth who happened to be John's cousin. John knew who Jesus was. He also knew that Jesus ought to be baptizing him. After he was baptized, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

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The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River and as best we can tell, this is where it happened.

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The Jordan River winds and turns even more so than the Cyhogaua River does in Cleveland.

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The Jordan River is not a wide river even at its start, like the Mississippi or Missouri Rivers. **(Click)** At its northern beginning, it moves along brush and wooded banks, and **(Click)** as it moves south, it get smaller moving through farm land.

Today, there are a couple of things I would like to point out about Jesus' baptism.

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1. First of all, when Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit came upon him.

Pastor Randy Ott tells a story about a family with young children that had started attending his church. The mom was telling the Pastor about her family going to McDonald. The kids were all excited. Well, what kid isn't, but that is not why they were excited. **(Click)** They were excited because a seagull landed on the hood of their car. Tell me, when is the last time you were excited because a seagull landed on your hood of your car? Well, her little 4-year-old in the car said, "Look Mom! **(Click)** It's the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove!"

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In the case of Jesus, the symbolism of the dove is profound. Remember, Jesus is was the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the Messiah who so many hoped would be a warrior-king. Yet the Holy Spirit, which is characterized as a mighty wind or tongues of flame in other parts of the Bible, came upon Jesus in the form of a dove, **(Click)** a symbol of peace and meekness.

It is worth noting that for Luke **(Click)** doves were the minimum sacrifice that a poor person could bring to the temple to be sacrificed for his or her sins (Luke 2: 24). This may be that this dove symbolized Jesus' coming as a sacrifice for our sins, even for the very poorest and least of us.

You may also recall that Noah sent out a dove to find signs that the water of the flood was receding. **(Click)** When the dove returned in the evening with an olive leaf in its beak, Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth (Genesis 8:11). **(Click)** The dove, then, was a symbol of hope and salvation. Jesus too is the hope and salvation of the world being saved from the flood of our sinfulness.

Right from the beginning, we can see Jesus was a different kind of Messiah. He came not as conqueror but as a peace maker; not as a master, but as a servant; not as a judge, but as a Savior. The symbol for Jesus Christ is not that of an eagle or a hawk, but a dove.

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2. Second, it should be noted that Christ was baptized by his cousin John.

Sometimes in families, we don't always see the blessings and special abilities that our family members have. Being related to these people, we often miss or even intentionally minimize these gifts because – well, we're related! John did not make that mistake.

John was Elizabeth and Zechariah's boy. **(Click)** Elizabeth was Mary's second cousin. So that would make **(Click)** John and Jesus third cousins. Even though Jesus was family, John knew that Jesus was someone special--someone far greater than he himself. John fully understood who his cousin Jesus was.

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He said: "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

That's why when Jesus came to John to be baptized, he right away said, "Wow, I need to be baptized by You and yet You come to me to be baptized. I don't understand!" Jesus simply explained, "Let it be for now; for it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

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3. **Third, John told the people "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance," and even though Jesus came with grace and peace, Jesus did not repudiate John's message.**

(Click) Righteousness is an important characteristic of the followers of Jesus. People who are baptized ought to live differently than people who are not. **(Click)** They are kinder, they seek justice, they are more forgiving and loving. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance and baptized persons live on a higher plane than those who are not baptized.

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A 10 year-old boy in Rev. Sarchet's congregation named Cameron, walked into his office one day and said he needed to talk. Cameron was fresh from soccer practice. He was wearing his Cincinnati Reds baseball cap. But Cameron had a request for his pastor. "I'd like to be baptized," he said. "We were learning about Jesus' baptism in Sunday School. The teacher asked the class who was baptized, and all the other kids raised their hands but me. I want to be baptized too."

Using his best pastoral concern, Rev. Sarchet said, “Cameron, do you want to be baptized just because everyone else is?” His freckles winked up as he replied, **(Click)** “No. I want to be baptized because it means I belong to God.” His pastor was touched by his understanding. “Well, then,” the pastor said, “How about next Sunday?”

The boy’s smile turned to concern and he asked, “Do I have to be baptized in front of all those people in the church? Can’t I just have a friend baptize me in a river?” Pastor asked where he came up with that idea. “Well,” he said, **(Click)** “Jesus was baptized by his cousin John in a river, wasn’t he?”

Caught off guard, he conceded, “You have a point. But,” Pastor asked, “if a friend baptized you in the river, **(Click)** how would the church recognize it?” Cameron responded with these unforgettable words: **(Click)** “By my new way of life,” he said. Cameron’s understanding was far from childish. It was profound.

Baptism--whether it occurs as an infant, a youth or an adult—signifies a new way of life. If there is one thing that is hurting the church’s witness today, it is that church people are often indistinguishable from the general population. When people do think of us as different from everyone else, it is usually in a negative sense--as coming across as close-minded or judgmental. John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance.

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There is an old story of a machinist at the Ford Motor Company in Detroit who **(Click)** became a Christian and was baptized. He decided he needed to make **(Click)** restitution for some parts and tools he had stolen from the company prior to his conversion. **(Click)** The next morning he brought all the tools and parts back to his employer that he had pilfered over the years and asked for his foreman’s forgiveness.

This was such an amazing turn of events that the foreman immediately sent a telegram to Henry Ford, who was visiting a plant in Europe at the time. Ford immediately returned a cable with this message: **(Click)** “Dam up the Detroit River, and baptize the entire city.”

Can you imagine a world where the whole city or the whole country or even the whole world was baptized and everyone lived out his or her baptism? Then the Lord’s Prayer that our Master taught would truly be fulfilled: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Slide #14

4. **This is to say that baptism is more than a religious rite; it is a rite of passage to a new life.**

(Click) The truth of the matter is that many of us take our baptism for granted. Many of us have our babies baptized without truly thinking of it as a binding commitment on our own part to bring up our children as committed followers of Jesus Christ. Even as adults, many are baptized with little recognition of what it means to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. For some of us, baptism is simply one of the rituals we go through as we make our way through life.

(Click) That would not be true if we lived in many parts of the world. In many parts of the world being baptized requires immense courage. **(Click)** In countries like Nepal, or the Soviet or Chinese and many Islamic countries, it was like signing their own death warrant.

That is the way it was for those who were baptized into the early church. It meant that, at the risk of their lives, they were becoming part of this group of people who were despised by the greater culture. **(Click)** When you say, “I have been baptized,” that ought to mean something quite significant.

Slide #14

I like the simple way that Pastor Tony Evans explains the meaning of baptism. He says, “When a lady gets married, she puts on a ring. That ring does not make her married. She could be married without a ring, just like you could be saved without being baptized. But what the ring does do is serve as a sign that she is married, she has already been spoken for and belongs to another.

“I am certain that a wife who refused to wear her ring would insult any man. He would probably take that as a rejection of him. A man who had a wedding band and refused to wear it would probably insult his wife. **(Click)** The ring is more than a piece of jewelry. **(Click)** It represents an institution and a covenant. The ring is symbolic for marriage. **(Click)** It means I belong to someone else. **(Click)** Baptism is more than a rite we perform. **(Click)** It is an institution and represents our covenant with God. **(Click)** Baptism says I belong to someone – Jesus.