

“Baptizer with the Holy Spirit!”

With today being **Baptism of Jesus Sunday**, it is natural for us to focus on Jesus’ Baptism and our own baptismal experience. I was Christened as a baby – another term for Infant Baptism. I was unaware of that fact until I was going through Confirmation Class at First Congregational Church, UCC in Fort Worth. We were asked to find out whether or not we were baptized as an infant. I asked my parents, and then, they told me I was Christened as a baby in a Presbyterian Church in Olathe, Kansas. Since Confirmation is primarily intended to be a Rite of the Church through which persons, who were baptized as infants, accept for themselves the vows their parents accepted for them when they were baptized, when I was Confirmed, I felt the process was short circuited because I had only learned I was baptized as an infant toward conclusion of the yearlong Confirmation Class. So, a short time later, I requested of the Pastor that I be baptized. Further, since he agreed, I asked that I be baptized by immersion. It just so happened that several other Youth also decided to ask to be baptized again – this time by immersion. We borrowed a baptism tank of a Disciples of Christ, Christian Church.

Have you been baptized? Do you recall your experience of being baptized? When a Youth, who was baptized as an infant, goes through Confirmation Class and then the Rite of Confirmation, she or he goes through a truly transformational event, if they understand they are accepting for themselves the vows their parents took during their Infant Baptisms. Confirmation enables a Youth to come to a deeper recognition of God’s love for him or her and how baptism is a sign and demonstration of that truth.

I suspect many folks misunderstand our baptisms to be like the baptism people experienced when they came to John the Baptist to be baptized. Those baptized by John the Baptist were not done so in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. John’s baptism was not a symbol of believers belonging to Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. Instead, it was a public acknowledgment of one’s need of God’s Forgiveness. John the Baptist baptized people, and then, affirmed God was forgiving everyone who repented. Unfortunately, the Synoptic Gospels seek to encourage us to perceive Christian Baptism to be the same type of baptism as the one which John the Baptist performed on the general population and on Jesus. Today’s bulletin cover encourages the common understanding of the Synoptic Gospels’ interpretation of Jesus’ or Christian Baptism – of our baptism being like the one done by John the Baptist. The last part of **Mark 1:4** says **John’s was, “A BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE for the forgiveness of sins.”** Christian Baptism is not one of earning the forgiveness of sins through repentance. Instead, Christian Baptism is the sign we are already forgiven – even though we do not deserve it – because of God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love for us shown in God’s Son, Jesus Christ.

However, among the differences between the Gospel of John and the accounts of the Synoptic Gospels with reference to Jesus’ Baptism is the Gospel of John revealed something important about John the Baptist’s experience of Jesus’ Baptism. The Gospel of John, alone, reports how the Baptist described his baptism of Jesus and the message he received from God. The Baptizer stated in **vs. 31, “I did not know who he would be, but I came baptizing with water in order to make him known to the people of Israel.”** The message the Baptizer received from God is shared in **vs. 32-33, “I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and stay on him. I still did not know that he was the one, but God, Who sent me to baptize with water, had said to me, ‘You will see the Spirit come down and stay on a man; he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”** **Therefore, God said Jesus is the Baptizer with the Holy Spirit!** How many times do the gospels – either Matthew, Mark, or Luke – or John, describe Jesus baptizing? Anyone want to venture a guess? Jesus is never described as actually baptizing someone! So, what did John the Baptist mean when he said **Jesus “is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit”?**

The Synoptic Gospels don’t quote the Baptist describing his baptism of Jesus and God’s message about the descent of the Holy Spirit on him. **Matthew quotes the Baptist supposedly saying in 3:11a, “I baptize you with water to show that you have repented, but the one who will come after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”** Sounds like “fire and brimstone” doesn’t it. Luke also includes “fire” with the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

However, the Gospel of **Mark quotes the Baptizer saying in 1:8, “I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”** Notice the difference? Many biblical scholars see Mark as the earliest of the Synoptic Gospels. Evidently, Matthew and Luke each had a copy of Mark and another source called “Q”, which is chosen and used by Matthew and Luke when they agree against Mark. If those assumptions are basically accurate, then

Mark's account is usually the earliest version of what Jesus said in the Synoptic Gospels. So, in this case Mark agrees with the Gospel of John in reporting the Baptist only said Jesus would *"baptize with the Holy Spirit."*

Matthew and Luke's inclusion of *"fire"* in their reports of what the Baptist said about the baptism Jesus would carry out, seem to characterize Jesus' Baptism as being very judgmental – like the Baptist. However, Mark seems to join the Gospel of John in focusing on Jesus baptizing *"with the Holy Spirit."* **Since none of the gospels report Jesus actually baptizing like the Baptist, what did John the Baptist mean when he spoke of the Messiah baptizing *"with the Holy Spirit"*?**

The following Scripture quotations may point us in the correct direction for answering that question:

In John 14:15-17 Jesus promised his disciples, *"If you love me, you will obey my commandments. I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever. He is the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God. The world cannot receive him, because it cannot see him or know him. But you know him, because he remains with you and is in you."* The Holy Spirit is given to us because we are in a special relationship with Jesus Christ. The Spirit is another Helper who *"reveals the truth about God"* and *"remains with you and is in you."* What is the sign or indication of our special relationship with the Son of God? Christian Baptism is the answer and with it we are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit will dwell in us!

In John 14:26 Jesus returns to the subject of what our reception of the Holy Spirit will mean, *"The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you."* Our baptism of the Holy Spirit means the Spirit will enable us to remember what Jesus has told his disciples and will teach us what we need to know. In John 20:22, the Risen Jesus Christ bestows upon – ?baptizes? the disciples by doing and saying, *"Then he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"*

The Apostle Paul also provides us some insight into what it means to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, Paul wrote, *"There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to all for their particular service. The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all."*

As we come into the special relationship with God's Son, Jesus Christ, we are given – baptized with the Holy Spirit! The Spirit *"reveals the truth,"* teaches and enables us to remember the Teachings and Command of Jesus, gifts us with skills and abilities *"for the good of all,"* and is constantly available to confirm God's Loving Presence with us.

In the Old Testament days, there was a tradition of Covenant Renewal. Periodically, the People of God and the Divine Parent would recall and renew their Covenant commitment to each other. Likewise, today we have the opportunity to symbolically demonstrate and Renew our Baptism Vows. In a few moments, I will ask you to **stand, if you want to Renew your Baptism Vows.** If you so affirm, then you will be invited to **come forward to the table** in front the rail on the Choir side and to then **dip a finger in the bowl of water and touch your forehead with your finger** as a symbolic way of Renewing your Baptism Vows. **Then, after giving thanks, we will go forth to live as God's People – Jesus' Disciples, who are Baptized by the Holy Spirit and sharing the gifts of the Spirit "for the good of all"!** Amen.

Please stand, if you will participate in this opportunity to Renew your Baptism Vows.

Is it your prayerful desire, need, and commitment to Reaffirm and Renew your Baptism Vows? If so, repeat after me the phrases of the affirmation projected on the screen, **"I Reaffirm and Renew my Baptism Vows of Loyalty and Service to Jesus Christ – the Son of God, to the Divine Parent, to the Holy Spirit, and to the Church – the Body of Christ! Amen."**

If you just renewed your baptism vows, you are invited to come forward, dip your finger in the water, and then place your finger on your forehead.