

Lutheran Church of the Master  
580 Kuhn Road, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188  
Curt Gerald, Interim Pastor  
January 9 & 10, 2010  
The Baptism of Jesus  
“He Isn’t Cooing Anymore!”

The First Lesson: Isaiah 43

<sup>1</sup> But now, this is what the LORD says—  
he who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:  
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

<sup>2</sup> When you pass through the waters,  
I will be with you;  
and when you pass through the rivers,  
they will not sweep over you.  
When you walk through the fire,  
you will not be burned;  
the flames will not set you ablaze.

<sup>3</sup> For I am the LORD, your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;  
I give Egypt for your ransom,  
Cush and Seba in your stead.

<sup>4</sup> Since you are precious and honored in my sight,  
and because I love you,  
I will give men in exchange for you,  
and people in exchange for your life.

<sup>5</sup> Do not be afraid, for I am with you;  
I will bring your children from the east  
and gather you from the west.

<sup>6</sup> I will say to the north, 'Give them up!'  
and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.'  
Bring my sons from afar  
and my daughters from the ends of the earth—

<sup>7</sup> everyone who is called by my name,  
whom I created for my glory,  
whom I formed and made."

The Second Lesson: Acts 8:14-17 (New International Version)

<sup>14</sup>When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. <sup>15</sup>When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, <sup>16</sup>because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup>Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel: Luke 3:15-22 (New International Version)

<sup>15</sup>The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. <sup>16</sup>John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs 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 barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." <sup>18</sup>And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.

<sup>19</sup>But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, <sup>20</sup>Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

The Baptism and Genealogy of Jesus

<sup>21</sup>When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened <sup>22</sup>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."

In addition to the lessons for this day which have been read ... hear these words from Acts 19 and from Mark 1:

Acts 19: "(Paul) said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' They replied, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' Then Paul said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' They answered, 'Into John's baptism.' 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, in Jesus.'"

Mark 1: "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan ..."

Acts 19: "On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

- I. John's baptism must not have held, then? After all, if all sorts of folks (including Jesus himself) had been baptized by John ... and then some of those folks were later re-baptized by Paul ... what was wrong with John's baptism?
  - a. Did John use too much water? Or too little? Was it a matter of depth of water? I don't think so.
  - b. Did John baptize at the wrong age? Did he baptize too young? Did he baptize too old? I don't think so.
  - c. Or is it the case that John's baptism was intended for the time leading up to Jesus to point ahead to him ... and that it was replaced by a baptism that pointed back to Jesus as is indicated in Paul's words.
  - d. Is it then the case that you and I have been baptized not according to John's baptism which refers to the time prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus ... but according to the baptism to which Paul bears witness which refers to the new day which started at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out into and through the Church ... a baptism which more than pointing back to some moment in history actually incorporates us into the very Body of Jesus Christ which is called the Church in which and through which God is now doing a new thing through the Power of the Holy Spirit?
  - e. Our baptism is not the baptism of repentance pointing ahead to Jesus ... our baptism is the means by which the Holy Spirit enters into our lives and enables us to speak and to witness about Jesus ... today!
- II. Baptism is not about kneeling in rivers or depth of water ... immersion or sprinkling ... infants or adults ... indoors or outdoors.
  - a. Baptism is about Jesus.
    - i. It is about becoming a storyteller ... and the story is about Jesus' life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return. The song is an old one, but the school song for

this team is that old one that says "I Love to Tell the Story!"

- ii. It is about becoming a member of a team ... and the team is the Church. Scripture is quite clear that there can be no "Long Ranger Christian" - IF a person is following Jesus, that person WILL be and will be a part of the Church (in its broadest most universal or "catholic" sense).
- iii. It is about receiving a job description ... and the job description is "Christian." Once we have been baptized, our mission is to do as Jesus did, to speak as Jesus spoke, to love as Jesus loved, and to serve as Jesus served.
- iv. It is about receiving a promise ... and the promise is eternity. This is the promise that will be spoken over us the very last time as the box in which our body rests is lowered into the vault and the presiding minister says, "Almighty God, into your care and keeping we commend this, your servant."
- v. It is about being a part of a family ... and the head of the family is God ... and our closest cousins are the Jews and the part of the family we don't know very well includes the Muslims ... and somehow we're related to the other folks in the neighborhood, even the ones who don't know the head of the family. So as family we are called to be hospitable toward and with each other even as we continue to seek every opportunity to tell those who don't know "about Jesus and his love" (as our school song says.)
- vi. It is about being a servant ... because God likes to be in the midst of God's people rather all alone in the Holy of Holies. It started back there in the wandering of the Hebrew people under Moses ... remember that the tent of God's presence set up in the middle of the people (with 3 tribes on the north, 3 on the south, 3 on the east, and 3 on the west.) God liked to be in the middle of his people. It was David and Solomon who came up with the idea of a temple ... one in which the Ark of God's presence was put into a secluded room into which only one person could

enter once a year ... David and Solomon may have designed the idea ... but the Old Testament is not sure that the idea started with God!

- vii. It is about playing follow the leader ... "where he leads me I will follow" is the school song ... and you never know where you're going to end up when Christ is leading!
- viii. It is about inviting the rest of the family to the family reunion rather than being satisfied to see the same old faces show up meal after meal.
- ix. It is about perseverance ... Scripture tells us that Jesus started with twelve disciples ... then we can add in some other folks like Paul and Peter ... and after a few years "all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord." And that was without Facebook and the Internet! If the Holy Spirit enabled 12 or a few more people to cover the entire country, what could the Holy Spirit do through the 200 who will be here today? Just think ... a witness you might make on the Internet when you go home could literally be seen and read by hundreds of thousands of people before the sun sets in Carol Stream today!

- III. Baptism is about hard work ... THE hard work ... that each Christian is drafted into through the waters of baptism ... whether it be a baptistry full of water through which an adult walks and into which he or she is dunked ... or whether it be a little stream of water poured from a pastor's hand over the head of the infant or adult ... age and depth aren't the point ... "Mission and Ministry" is the point of baptism.
  - a. You and I have been drafted by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ every day of our life until that moment of our last breath when we receive our marching orders that will transfer us from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant ...
  - b. And so far our commander in chief, whose name is Jesus, is probably concerned about our effort ... because the enemy is gaining on us. The enemy for the Christian is the sense of unbelief that has our world in its grip.

- i. A symptom is the declining worship attendance throughout Christianity today ... mainline, Roman Catholic, and even now in "evangelical" churches.
- ii. It is the symptom we are seeing every night in the ads being sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church about "coming home."
- iii. I talk about this in this month's newsletter and in this year's annual report ...
- iv. And what is true globally and internationally is certainly true also right here and right now.
- v. Like our adversary Satan, it is deceptive ... because everything looks so good.
- vi. Worship attendance has been increasing this fall ... 212 and 412 have great results ... children are coming to our preschool ... and every day Monday through Thursday families are receiving food through the walk in food pantry (not a ministry of this Church but certainly a ministry provided within our facilities and many people don't know the difference).
- vii. But a combination of factors ... including but not limited to the recession, 911, stock market plunge, home foreclosures, in addition to a historic unwillingness to talk about stewardship and proportionate giving and tithing ... are now placing this congregation at risk of closing its doors possibly within this calendar year.
- viii. This should not be a shock to anyone who reads the newsletter ... every month's issue last week showed the trend ... as leaders of the congregation we kept hoping and praying that it would reverse in the fall or at Thanksgiving or in December ... but it didn't.
- ix. So I ask of you this evening or this morning five things:
  1. PRAYER ... that the God working within us through the Holy Spirit will help us see right now what we cannot see ourselves. Pray that God will help you and each member consider if there is anything being withheld that is intended for God's work here and now. We know that many are maxed out already ... giving all they can and some even more

than they should. I also suspect, given the recent history of this congregation, that a good number of folks are withholding what they used to and or still could give ... and I would ask any of those who may be present (tonight/this morning) to open up and to let go of what you really aren't supposed to keep.

2. PRESENCE at the Annual Meeting two weekends from now on Sunday, January 24, at 11:30AM. The current Council cannot on its own overturn several years of living beyond our congregational means. We need to gather the family together for a congregational meeting ... and we need every confirmed member to be there.
3. We're developing a PLETHORA OF POSSIBILITIES for future ministry here. As I say in my portion of the annual report, I am preparing a file for the congregation's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in a few years even as I am looking for new ways of doing ministry here or ways of distributing both our assets and liabilities within the next couple of years, if necessary.
4. I ask for your PATIENCE because we have never been here before.
  - a. Generations before us have ... but ours hasn't. All of our supports, save one, have vanished ... federal and state funded partners are sidelined ... townships and municipalities are hamstrung ... members are unemployed and foreclosures are threatening ... it is going to continue to be messy here as well as everywhere else ...
  - b. ... but there is that one support that has not faltered ... and his name is Jesus ... and his mission is not deterred by recessions or foreclosures or church buildings or terrorists.

5. And I ask for your PARTICIPATION in whatever way you can at this time. If you are a member of this congregation it is because you asked to be a member and you made some promises of participation. This is not a time to talk about what happened decades ... ago years ago ... or months ago. This is not a time to talk about your church as "them and us." Not only are WE in this together ... but Jesus is waiting on us too!
  - a. The TIME is NOW and the PLACE is HERE!
  - b. Wally Armbruster, *Let Me Out! (I'm a Prisoner in a Stained Glass Jail)*, (Multnomah Press, 1985) pages 20-59.