

**Lesson: Acts 8:14-17**  
**Gospel: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**

**Baptism of Our Lord**  
**January 9, 2022**

**“Thanks4Giving – Baptismal Blessings”**  
**Sermon by Pastor Lowell Nelson**  
**American Lutheran Church of Sun City**

God bless you as we begin this Epiphany season together. So, do you remember when you were baptized? Now, for some that have that as an infant baptism, of course the answer is “no”, but you have been told about that. For me, I was baptized September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1957. I was there, and Uncle Ray and Aunt Rosalie were the sponsors, Dad was the officiant at that. Lutheran theology expresses this total confidence in God’s grace that it isn’t by my own effort that I deserve to be baptized, it is God’s gracious gift. Certainly, that is true, but for some of us we were baptized when we were older, perhaps in junior high age, high school age, or as an adult – all baptisms are a sign of God’s graciousness, the epiphany that we have something real, this gift of water, life-giving as it is in God’s word and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes I make fun of being a Lutheran, I have been one all my life, and so I’ll give you an example. Here in this beautiful sanctuary, you can clearly see Jesus. There is a stained glass that we have here of the Holy Spirit, but it’s in the back where you will never see it. The lighted candle here, you can see it there, but we don’t make a big deal of that, but that’s the eternal light, God’s Holy Spirit flaming there. But Lutherans are all about the Holy Spirit. We just do it in kind of a constrained way. I hope to loosen you up just a little bit. That’s why I’m preaching from here instead of up in the pulpit. I’m preaching near this beautiful baptismal font, this should be wet more often. I have a comment to you, do you have any friends that aren’t baptized? Often, I hear people say, “No, all my friends are baptized.” Pastorally I’m going to say this to you, “Make some new friends.” There are lots of people that could benefit from knowing that God’s love is the strongest force in the universe. It says it this way in Psalm 29, “ascribe to the Lord you gods (little gods, the gods that get in the way), ascribe to the Lord glory and strength”. I don’t know if you have noticed, but there are a lot of problems in the world that seem that they dwarf the strength of God. That is absolutely wrong. God’s strength, God’s love, we are part of the most powerful movement in the universe, the love of God. So, ascribe to the Lord this amazing glory and strength, and then at the end of the Psalm, it says it this way. “Give strength to your people, Lord, and the blessings of peace.” Peace is when Christ is at the center of our life. Brothers and sisters, we need that in this world with the divisions that we have. We are part of this beautiful movement of God.

The Acts reading that Pete led us through, there was a mission field called Samaria. Samaria is a place that no one that was of Jewish faith would think there was any hope there, because that is where the ten tribes that had been absorbed into the Syrian empire, Syria came down and wiped out ten tribes. They did it in different ways, certainly death, but also by transporting them up Syria and bringing the Syrians in, they had lost the way. So going to Samaria would be a God forsaken place basically. In this movement of God that they prayed for Peter and John, prayed that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Receive, baptize in the name of the Lord, but receive the Holy Spirit. This receive is like a gift you have, all through this gift of baptism, we have received the Holy Spirit. I am going to prove it to you in just a little bit through the baptismal service. How do you receive something that you already have? Take hold of it, open it up, it is a gift. Life is a gift, now how do you open it up? I’m not so sure. I have preached at different services and congregations. There was a Baptist church next to Emmanuel Medical Center, and

it was before I was even a pastor. I was used to more Lutheran traditions, this group was not constrained. So there was a whole bunch of men in the front and they were praying for me, and they did it right during the service. This one guy kept on saying, "Lord help this man! Help this brother." That's kind of encouragement, right? As you pray in a more Lutheran way, which is "O Lord please help this guy."

We are not alone, the Holy Spirit is with us and encouraging us. Take hold of it, God is with you. God is with us. The Luke text says it so beautifully here, that this movement of expectation and joy, "Are you the one?" John was a proclaimer of the message, "Jesus is the one." I wanted to comment about the Holy Spirit.

During this time of Stewardship, sometimes you can perhaps feel just a wee bit of condemnation. Questions here on the brochure... How does my level of giving compare with other ways I use my money? How adequately does my giving reflect my gratitude to God for all the blessings I have received? Where would I be if I doubled my offering? How much more could I give if I really wanted to? You may receive that as a spirit of condemnation, but all in Christ's love, there is no condemnation. But the Holy Spirit does work to convict us. Convicting meaning to encourage you, to take a look at your precious life. There is no condemnation here, right? The Holy Spirit convicts us, you have probably had that experience in life. I just want to say that the Holy Spirit is not condemning, the Holy Spirit is convicting and opens us up to making Christ the most important part of our life. I encourage you to always receive stewardship materials as Holy Spirit led and grateful for your life and mine.

The praying, the baptism of Jesus and praying and heaven was opened. That is the same for you and I, brothers and sisters. Heaven is open! The most glorious statement I can say, is that this is the phrase "You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased." Is the same statement to you and I. Beloved, this agape love, this divine love. It is the same love the Holy Spirit brings to you and I as brought to Jesus. There is no difference in that quality of love. It is not less than Jesus received, it is the love of God through the Holy Spirit, and it is something certainly to be thankful for.

I am going to finish with a bang here. I am going to prove to you the Holy Spirit is tremendously Lutheran, and I might even get an *amen* out of it. I'll put Pastor Garvey on notice, you might need to help the team here just a little bit. But there will be some openings here.

Baptism has marvelous things going on in it. One of it is that it begins with an exorcism, did you know that? We don't think of it that way, but this renouncing part at the beginning... do you remember these words? "Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God?" and we answer, "I renounce them." That is a statement of claim. I had a very interesting experience, being a Lutheran pastor, I have gone to a lot of meetings. Can you imagine that I have been to a lot of meetings? Once in a while, the Spirit moves and I actually had this same little hymnal and I was visiting someone. I had a street ministry involved back in Nebraska where people that were not really connected with the church, learned to trust what we were doing and they would come in for help. There was a guy who had a wife, he was very concerned. He said, "I don't know if something has happened to her. She is in the mental health center. Would you please visit her?" I had never met her before. I had this hymnal, and I still look back at that, I was just thankful that the Spirit had me bring it, I'm not even sure why I brought it, it's a hymnal, not just a straight Bible. In talking with this woman the first time I met her, I could tell she was reacting to this in a very strange way, like she was afraid of it. Like she was fearful of it. That gave me a hint that this was not just a mental health issue, but a spiritual issue. After getting to know her, I used these words, "Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God?" We had a release, right there...this would

be a good place for an *amen*. Typical Lutheran style, you would say, “well maybe we should have a committee meeting first and then we’ll see if we want to do this.” The fun about living with the Spirit is it is right there, life is active. I am just thinking about the class on Friday, there is going to be active movement of the Spirit. In your own life this week, the activity of the Spirit, you are not alone, the power of God is the strongest power. If it takes somebody who is affected by the demonic to see the power and remind me how powerful baptism is, Thank you God for that tremendous blessing.

Then we speak of what we are for, and the last question. “Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit? We say, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” I remember teaching confirmations, I’m going to say this again, but I remember kids saying “What does the Holy Spirit have to do with this? The holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting?” The statement is **everything!** The Holy Spirit is involved with that, with our church. You are called here by the Holy Spirit. The communion of saints gives us hope for a life eternal, that those who have passed, we grieve nothing like people that think that life terminates with the death of the body. We are people of faith and hope and because of the forgiveness of sins we are set free and know of our future. The resurrection of our body and life everlasting. Amen, right? We are Spirit blessed people.

I just wanted to say it this way, when we baptize, we use these precious words. “We give you thanks O God that through water, and the Holy Spirit (so we claim right there) that you give your daughters and sons new birth, cleanse them from sin and raise them to eternal life.” Again, I am going back to confirmation days, but I would preach to these precious kids that wonderful thing called life when you are seventh and eighth graders, living chemistry experiments, right, when these precious kids are learning. I would say stuff, because they are picking up on the cues of life, that life is challenging. I would say, “You have nothing to fear. You have already died and have been resurrected with the Lord. You have nothing to fear for your life, nothing will separate you from the love of God,” Amen. This is what our understanding is, it is more than cleansing, it is death and resurrection. It is the most powerful type, it is God’s love that yields this forth.

Remember your baptism and/or your confirmation, because we renew this in our confirmation understanding. I just love it, I wish I could do it to each one of you, old fashioned, get you here kneeling and just put my hands on your head, like the old style is, and say this to you. I’ll use Pastor Gary here. “Sustain Pastor Gary with the gift of your Holy Spirit.” And then all these beautiful phrases. “The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of council and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the Spirit of joy in your presence both now and forever.” Amen, thank you brother!

I wanted to end with this. You have been marked with the cross of Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit. How do I know that, sealed meaning completed. God’s imprint is upon you, never forget that. You may forget it looking out, but when people see you, they see the love of God. End it this way, “Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.” My daily encouragement is to retrace that and reclaim yourself as a child of God every morning when you freshen up with your shower or bath. It is the most important thing.

Isn’t it cool that the Holy Spirit is all involved with life, that the Holy Spirit sets us free? The Holy Spirit is what unites us as brothers and sisters, from Chuck’s dear testimonial to your testimony if we had time to hear each testimony here. We are united and it is a blessing, the blessing of God in baptism, that we are set free, empowered to live. I think Pastor David is going to teach a little more about the gift of the Holy Spirit through the prayers. I want to offer this prayer for you.

Dear God, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in your love let us extol your praise, give glory to you and in so doing, bring peace on our own heart. Let every person here open the gift, not in a way that is strange to them, but enlightening and encouraging, that in life itself you are with us. Thank you, God for this gift.

And all God's people said, AMEN!

Amen