

January 13, 2019
The Baptism of Jesus

We were supposed to have a baptism this morning at the 9:00 service. But we re-scheduled it because of the weather. And while I think it was definitely the right decision, it is also a bit disappointing. Because today is a day that is all about baptism. It is the day that we celebrate the baptism of Jesus. Every year, on the Sunday after Epiphany, we read the story of Jesus' baptism. It is one of the few stories that is found in all four gospels. And of course, all four have their own versions of what happened. This year, we read Luke's version of how the baptism of Jesus took place. Last year it was Mark and next year will be Matthew. John's version shows up in different places in the lectionary, because, like most of the Gospel of John, it is just different.

But before we get to the Gospel stories of Jesus' baptism, I want to do something a little bit different this morning. I want to first look at the Moravian understanding of baptism and see what it is and what it means to us as followers of Jesus. Baptism is one of the two sacraments of the Moravian church. It is foundational to our faith, so I thought it would be beneficial to take a bit of a closer look.

The liturgy for baptism in the blue hymnal is found on page 165. In case you are wondering why we are using the blue hymnal and not the red, it is not because we are completely switching from red to blue. We are going to continue to use both because each of them have a lot of value. But this morning, I want to look at the baptism liturgy from the blue hymnal because it has one liturgy for baptism, where the red has different liturgies for the baptism of children and adults.

Typically, the Moravian church practices infant baptism, but we are not limited to infant baptism. We believe that baptism at any age is acceptable. But we do believe that once you are baptized, you are baptized. There is no need to be re-baptized as an adult

if you were baptized as an infant. Baptism is baptism no matter what age you are for it is not something that we do, but it is something that God does through us and for us.

Our baptism liturgy begins with these words (READ FIRST PARAGRAPH OF LITURGY) This is a basic description of how the OT covenant between God and the Jewish people (as God's chosen people) was expanded and enlarged to become a covenant between God and ALL people. This was made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The next paragraph is more specifically about baptism. (READ 2ND PARAGRAPH) This references how baptism is a sacrament. A sacrament is something that the church does that was instituted by Jesus, or things that we do because Jesus did them. In the Moravian Church, our two sacraments are Baptism and Holy Communion.

In our liturgy we recognize Baptism as the means of entry into the new covenant. It is this act that marks the beginning of our discipleship. When we are baptized, we (or our parents on our behalf) are saying that we are choosing to follow Jesus, to be part of Christ's church, and we recognize we are saved from our sins by Jesus' life, sufferings, death and resurrection.

When we affirm that we are baptized into the death of Jesus, we are claiming his resurrection from the dead as our resurrection, from a life marked by sin and death to a new life of forgiveness and salvation. We then acknowledge that this new life is offered to children through the faith of their parents and the church, until the time when they are able to claim their baptism and faith as their own.

The next part of the baptism liturgy provides the opportunity for those being baptized, or for the parents and sponsors of a child, to profess their belief in God,

Father and Creator, Son and Savior, Holy Spirit and Sustainer, as made known through the Holy Scriptures. Once this is done, then the entire congregation joins in the Apostles' Creed, as a reminder of our unity in Christ and the commonality of our baptism and faith.

The Apostles' Creed is one of the oldest statements of faith of the Christian Church. It dates back to 390 AD and expresses belief in the trinitarian nature of God, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It follows this pattern and describes the nature and function of each person of the Trinity, the importance of the Church, and the promise of eternal life.

The baptism liturgy then returns to asking questions of those being baptized, or the parents and sponsors. The sponsors of an infant for baptism fill the role more commonly called "godparents". READ NEXT QUESTION. They promise to support the parents in their efforts to raise the child in the faith of God and to be able to fill in for them if necessary. Our liturgy asks if they are ready to commit themselves to a life of following Jesus and being an active part of the church.

Then, when only a child is being baptized, the parents and sponsors are asked (READ QUESTION) This is a reminder of what they are supposed to do for the child until the time when the child can confirm their faith in Jesus and make their own commitment to the church.

The final question is asked of the whole congregation (READ QUESTION) It is asking us all to accept the person being baptized as a member of the congregation and to take on the obligation of helping them to grow in their faith.

The prayer that follows connects the baptism being performed to both the old and new covenants of Scripture. It reminds of how water served as a sign of freedom for the

Hebrew people as Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt through the parting waters of the Red Sea. It recalls the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus when he was baptized in the waters of the Jordan River and how the same happens whenever anyone is baptized. In this prayer, the person being baptized is NAMED as we ask for God to send his Spirit upon them.

For the baptism of children, the prayer continues with a special recognition of the unique role that parents and sponsors play in the life and faith of the child and asks God to give them what they need to guide the child.

Then comes the actual baptism. The person is again named and the threefold application of water is done to symbolize the presence of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is followed by the laying on of hands by the minister, the parents and sponsors, during which this blessing is offered. (READ PARAGRAPH)

Before the final blessing, when adults are baptized, they are given a Scripture text as their Baptism text. When children are baptized, they will receive their Scripture when they confirm their baptism. The baptism concludes with the benediction and the welcome hymn.

One of the things that I love about baptisms is that whenever we have the opportunity to participate in a baptism, by praying the words of the liturgy, we are reminded of our own baptism and have the chance to renew the covenant we made with God and the church when we were baptized. This is why I wanted to take some time to look closer at this important service this morning. We all need to chance to recall and reflect on our baptism and our faith journey.

The significance of our baptism is something that is easy to overlook, especially if we were baptized as infants, because we likely don't remember our baptism. It is

something that was done for us, not something that we chose to do. Even when we confirm our faith as teenagers, I think that we fail to grasp the full impact and importance of it all.

Baptism is important to us just as it was important to Jesus. For us it marks the beginning of our faith journey. For Jesus, it marked the beginning of his ministry. As I said, it is significant enough that all four Gospels include it in their story of Jesus life.

Even though we are focusing on Luke's account this morning, I thought it would be helpful to look at the other three as well. Taken together they give us a much fuller picture of what happened when Jesus was baptized.

In Matthew we read:

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3

And in Mark:

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Mark 1

And finally, from John:

And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

John 1:32-34

As you can see there are some noticeable similarities in these four accounts. The main similarities are that all four versions feature Jesus, of course, and John the Baptist. All four have the Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove. And all of them have John pointing out the difference between the baptism that he is offering, a baptism with water, and the baptism that Jesus will offer, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Yet even there, they differ slightly, with Matthew and Luke including that Jesus will baptize with both the Holy Spirit and with fire. And all four have John recognizing that Jesus will be greater than he is himself, that he is unworthy to baptize Jesus. But that's about it.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as they often do, have the same basic story, even beyond what is included in all four Gospels. These three books are known as the Synoptics, from the Greek word meaning "seen together". They follow the same story line and have many of the same events, with Matthew and Luke expanding upon Mark. For the baptism of Jesus, all have the voice from heaven saying "*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*"

And this is it. This is what is most important about baptism, both for Jesus and for us. Baptism is all about identity. It is through baptism that our true identity is revealed. Baptism is where we are named and claimed as God's beloved children. It was when Jesus claimed his identity as the Son of God, the Messiah and received the blessing of his Father. Baptism is when we claim our identities as God's beloved children and as Jesus' followers, and we receive the blessing of the Father.

Jesus was about 30 years old when he was baptized by John. Prior to this moment, we don't really know what Jesus' life was like. Apart from the stories of his birth and the brief account of his visit to the Temple when he was 12, the Gospels don't tell us anything about what Jesus did before he was baptized. We can assume that he lived a normal, quiet life. He was probably known as the carpenter's son, and likely became a carpenter himself.

I often wonder if he struggled with this, if he knew that God had created him to be something special, but he wasn't quite sure what that meant or how that would play out. I wonder what it took for him to finally claim his identity as the Christ, the Messiah, the Beloved Son of God.

We don't know how it happened, how Jesus finally came to be baptized by John in the Jordan. But we do know that he did. He was baptized and he did claim his identity and it changed his life. And his life changed the world. He lived as who he was and who God created him to be- his beloved Son with who he was well pleased.

The same thing happens for us when we are baptized. When we are baptized we claim our identity as God's beloved children and we name ourselves as followers of Jesus. And our lives change. And through us, the world can change. As Jesus' followers, we love like Jesus loves, we live like Jesus lived, and we serve like Jesus served.

On this day, as we remember the baptism of Jesus, let us remember our own baptisms. Let us renew our belief in God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer; and recommit to our intention to participate actively in Christ's church, serving God ALL the days of our life. Let us claim our identity as God's beloved children and name ourselves as followers of Jesus.

As we follow him, let us remember that "through God's grace and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, we have been brought into the covenant; therefore let us live, yet not us alone, but let Christ live in us; and the life which we live now, let us live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave his life for us."

You are God's beloved child. With you he is well pleased. Amen.