

First Sunday after Epiphany
Year C

Isaiah 43:1-7

Psalm 29

Acts 8:14-17

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Each of the four gospels approaches the baptism of Jesus in a different manner. Each has its own emphasis on how to describe this event which is so important to the church. Matthew, in the third chapter of his gospel, includes a discussion between John and Jesus over who should baptize whom. Mark sticks to the facts that Jesus came to John at the Jordan and, as He was coming up out of the water, saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending, and heard the voice claiming Jesus as God's Son. John's remarks are more a statement of a past event as John the Baptizer tells of the Spirit descending on Jesus. As we heard in today's reading, Luke presents the baptism with very little detail, but with some unique points. While Matthew and Mark immediately follow the baptism with the temptation of Jesus, Luke injects the ancestry of Jesus into the story between the baptism and the temptation. Why would Luke do this?

If we look at the explanation of the baptism in Luke's gospel, there are two bits of information that might explain this sequencing in the reading. First, we have Jesus standing in line, so to speak, waiting for "all the people" to be baptized. He did not seek special treatment, but waited His turn. If we look at the genealogy, we see a difference from the one presented by Matthew. It begins with Jesus and then goes back in time, not just to Abraham, but all the way to Adam, son of God. Luke presents Jesus, not just as a Jew, but as one in the line of all mankind. Thus, we see the same attitude at the baptism.

Another unique point Luke makes is that Jesus was praying when the Spirit descended upon Him. None of the other gospels offer this point, but in Luke's gospel, we see Jesus praying at every major point in His life and ministry. Prayer appears to be a central tenet in all Jesus does.

What are we to make of these differences which Luke gives us? I believe there are two major take-a-ways from this. Baptism is the beginning point for our lives with God. It is important for Luke to share that all the people were baptized. Perhaps it is from this statement that we learn to place such an emphasis on this action. This is the beginning of our journey with God also.

The other point is equally important - that we pray each step of the way. Jesus prayed before He called the disciples, before He asked them who they thought He was, at the time of the transfiguration, before teaching the disciples to pray, before His arrest, and then on the cross. Each of these major events were preceded by prayer. Luke continues this lesson for us in the Book of Acts where he presents the church in prayer before major actions.

Prayer should be the focal point of our relationship with God. We should be following the example of Jesus and the early church in praying before every major decision we make. Prayer is not just for Sunday services or in times of crisis, but in every aspect of our lives. Prayer opens

our hearts to the moving of the Holy Spirit. Through prayer, we allow ourselves to seek the will of God for us as individuals and as a community of believers.

It is through prayer that we open ourselves up to the affirmation that Jesus received at His baptism. We are all sons and daughters of God in whom God is well pleased. We receive this message in prayer and it is evidenced in our ministries. Our prayers on Wednesday evening before we serve dinner, our prayers before meetings, and our prayers daily for each other show our commitment and faith in God. Prayer was at the center of every important event in the life of Jesus and it should be at the center of everything we do.