

The Baptized Life - Empowered By God's Spirit

**Luke 3: 21-22
1 Corinthians 12: 1-11**

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Two weeks ago we stopped at this event in the life of Jesus, the beginning, the time of his revelation to the world, the first step in a three year march to the cross –
– the baptism of Jesus.

As we thought about it, we came to realize that we were being faced with an either/or choice. We were faced with a clear division of the two key powers that were battling in his life -

- the power of God
- the power of Satan.

powers that battled not only in His life, but battled and **continue** to battle, through all creation.

In His baptism Jesus identified with all the water sagas of Old Testament history, sagas of death and life, of God's judgement on sin and His salvation to new life – the sagas of Noah, of Moses and of Israel.

It all comes together in Jesus.

And Jesus handed down this great ritual of baptism to his disciples, and through them to all of us who are in the Church.

Baptism - the great ritual that marks a person's entrance into God's family of faith, into the Body of Christ on earth. Hence we say that it is the **epiphany** moment for a believer entering the Church.

Baptism - a great and **holy** ritual. It is a ritual set apart by and for the glory of God. It sets participants apart as unique people, dedicated people, peculiar people who belong to Jesus Christ, people off-limits to the claims of the Devil. It's a **sacred** event - hence the word **SACRAMENT**.

Baptism - a sacred **ritual**. More than just words. There is movement, commitment, sloshing water, dripping wet skin. Mess. The Creator has made human beings to learn by more than just taking sounds in through their ears, and concepts resting in the brain. Learning happens in many ways by action, by involvement - touch and feel and see and smell and do.

Somewhere along the way Christians in the Western Church have lost much of the sloshing and dripping and movement that came with baptism. The core essentials have remained, but much of the drama and ritual was stripped away during the Enlightenment and the Scholastic age of history, where reason was seen as supreme, and teachers figured that all you needed was the mind and a logical presentation of truth. Today we're coming to see that their stripping the rituals and festivals and sacraments of the faith down to the barest of essentials, the minimalization of these great actions, was actually somewhat extreme.

We are pausing in this season of Epiphany to go back to the earliest recorded historical roots of the Christian Church. We will be having a peek at some of the drama and action that unfolded in the first centuries around the Epiphany event of baptism.

We began by talking about Baptism as the moment when Satan is consciously, carefully, and **completely** renounced. It is an exorcism.

Stand up - don't be passive, new believer.

Stand up and face west. Stare at the devil.

Hold your hands up in stubborn resistance against him.

State your renunciation.

Then - spit at him!

Some of you have asked and, YES, they actually did this!

Receive the prayer and blessing of the bishop.

Now, keep standing, believer.

Active.

Turn east - the direction of Zion.

Stare at your Saviour.

But lower your hands into a posture of surrender.

State your commitment to Him.

And bow.

Bow before your Lord.

Active stuff - the body involved in the belief and commitment of the mind and heart. Fitting, really. Remember what Jesus said, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind... AND STRENGTH.*"

Don't leave the body out of it!

Then there would be the stripping off of the clothes in which the person came to the baptismal service. And into the water they would go. Splash. Three times - in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Then up.

And dressed into a white robe - new clothes, pure clothes.

Picture of a dripping new, clean, pure life.

From death to life.

New in Jesus.

Baptized!!

And then this event.

One that I'd like to pause at for a moment.

One that you really don't see too often in Protestant churches today.

The presiding bishop at the ancient Church's baptismal sacrament would once more call forward the newly baptized believer.



He would reach out for a very special vial.

In that vial was anointing oil, prayed over and dedicated oil, oil mixed with a whole concoction of sweet smelling ingredients. Opening the vial, he poured it onto the believer while pronouncing a blessing. And the smell would fill the Sanctuary. Dripping, sweet, glistening - the anointing with oil.

And the Bishop would touch the brow, the eyes, the nostrils, the lips, the ears, the breast, the hands and the feet.

He would say, "*The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.*"

This action was called "**confirmation.**"

Gradually, in Western churches, especially Protestant ones, it became separated from baptism and was used later in life.

We have it today in the Christian Reformed Church - minus the oil - as Public Profession of Faith, where the believer, who was often baptized as an infant, stands to make a public declaration that **confirms** their faith in Jesus Christ. Elders will often gather round them, lay hands on them, and pray a prayer of blessing and protection over them.

In that prayer they ask for the Holy Spirit's presence.

And **that** is the key!!

The presence

of the Holy Spirit.

In the book of Acts, believers heard the apostle Peter say,

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Like Jesus - who came up out of the water of Baptism and received the Holy Spirit. In his case, descending in the form of a dove.

The gift of the Holy Spirit.

Louise read for us from 1 Corinthians 12 about the key role of the Holy Spirit in the development of a person's faith.

No Holy Spirit - no faith.

It's as simple as that.

Hear the Bible speak -

I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor 12:3

The Spirit moves us to surrender to Jesus.

The Spirit equips us to serve Jesus in different sorts of ways.

The Spirit - empowering believers to live out what they declared in their exorcism from Satan and declaration of allegiance to Jesus; to walk in the way of the baptized life;
in the uncompromising way of Christian obedience to Jesus.

We said last time that the Christian faith, you see, is much more than merely giving intellectual assent to a series of doctrines and statements.

Faith demands **faithfulness** - which is living action.

It is unconditional commitment.

It is total belonging.

No holds barred.

No compromise.

No negotiation.

The Holy Spirit enables us to be committed, to belong, to act out what we say.

The pouring of oil in the early church symbolized the coming and the presence of that Holy Spirit, of the life He gives, of His power that he brings to believers.

Of the way that the Spirit controls everything -

the brow – and what we think;

the eyes – and what we see;

the nostrils – and what we sense;

the lips – and what we speak;

the ears – and what we hear;

the breast – and what we feel;

the hands and feet – and how we behave.

Where did early Christians get the idea of oil?

From the bible.

In the Old Testament oil is the symbol of sacred authority and power given by God. One example of that symbolizing is found in Exodus 29.

God commands Moses to do the following with the High Priest and his family:

Ex 29:4 You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and wash them with water.

5 Then you shall take the vestments, and put on Aaron the tunic and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastpiece, and gird him with the decorated band of the ephod;

6 and you shall set the turban on his head, and put the holy diadem on the turban.

7 You shall take the anointing oil, and pour it on his head and anoint him.

Doesn't that sound an awful lot like baptism and subsequent anointing with oil?

In the very next chapter, Exodus 30, the Lord commands how this anointing oil is to be prepared.

Exodus 30:23 Take the finest spices: of liquid myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet-smelling cinnamon half as much, that is, two hundred fifty, and two hundred fifty of aromatic cane,

24 and five hundred of cassia -- measured by the sanctuary shekel -- and a hin of olive oil;

25 and you shall make of these a sacred anointing oil blended as by the perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil.

It is rich. It is fragrant. It is different from all other oil.

Just like the life of faith is rich; it spreads an aroma all round; it is different from all other kinds of life.

Then -

hear this!

Listen to what Moses was to do with that oil!

26 With it you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the covenant,

27 and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense,
28 and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin with its stand;
29 you shall consecrate them, so that they may be most holy; whatever touches them will become holy.

30 You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, in order that they may serve me as priests.

31 You shall say to the Israelites, "This shall be my holy anointing oil throughout your generations.

32 It shall not be used in any ordinary anointing of the body, and you shall make no other like it in composition; it is holy, and it shall be holy to you.

33 Whoever compounds any like it or whoever puts any of it on an unqualified person shall be cut off from the people."

All the sacred utensils that symbolized the Presence of God were to be covered with the oil. The oil was the symbol of God's coming in holy power. And it was to be treated with care and honour. This is nothing run of the mill!

Why such a big deal?

Because, friends,

the Presence of God in our lives is a BIG DEAL!!

HUGE

DEAL!

Nothing ho hum.

Nothing passive.

Nothing part way.

The Presence of God in our lives is real, unique, costly, precious and to be protected above all else - treated with great respect and dignity and care.

And so - this outer symbol of oil gets the same care.

Believer in the ancient church - feel that oil, smell it, see it.

Pure.

Precious.

Lovely.

Believers at Calvin Church - you remember, too!

Remember - you are pure and precious and lovely in the eyes of the Lord!

Remember - you have the pure, precious and lovely presence of the Lord's Spirit living in you, going with you.

Always!

Live like it.

Treat each others like it.

Remember, that person sitting beside you - another believer.

That person is pure in the eyes of Jesus.

That person is precious to Jesus.

That person is lovely to Jesus.

Please honour them for that!

And give thanks for the Spirit's presence in them.

As He lives in you!

It's who you are.

It's what we are.

In God's eyes, through Jesus.

And because of the Spirit, it makes us what we can become.
Obedient, joy-filled followers.

More about that when we meet next week and talk about being prophets, priests and kings.