

Nokesville UMC Sunday Worship [Baptism of the Lord]

January 10, 2021

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### Remember Your Baptism!

Mark 1:4-11

(1)

Noah and the Flood: Great wickedness of the human race had prevailed on the earth, and their minds were full of evil thought. God saw this, regretted, and decided to wipe away everything God made by water. And the world was covered by water. Being under the water referred to death, and being above the water referred to life.

Moses and Passover: The Israelites stood between the Red Sea and the Egyptian soldiers. At that moment, Moses raised his staff and stretched out his hand over the sea, and the water became divided. The Israelites went safely through the sea, while the entire army of Pharaoh that followed the Israelites were covered by water as the sea flowed back into place. No one survived. Being in the water referred to death, and being out of water referred to life.

There are two common features between these two stories. One is water appears in the stories as a key element; the other is before and after the water experience, Noah/his family and Moses/the Israelites changed their lives. Noah and his family became the new generation of the world with new life. Moses and the Israelites became free people, a free nation with new life. And today, we read another story related to water—Jesus’s baptism in the Jordan.

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According to the Lectionary schedule, we read the Gospel of Mark 1:4-11, commemorating the Baptism of the Lord. In the Gospels of Matthew (3:13-17), Mark (1: 9-11), and Luke (3:21-22), Jesus’s baptism by John the Baptist was well described. Here is Mark’s description: “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’” (vv. 9-11).

Due to Jesus’s baptism, the Jordan River became meaningful among Christians of the Eastern and the Western, Catholic and Protestant churches. Thus, when they visit the Holy Land, they immerse themselves in the Jordan to be baptized, to be reminiscent of, or to experience Jesus’s baptism. The following video is what I took when I visited Israel (video). Many visitors have a baptism experience in this area, but it is known and confirmed by many biblical scholars, archaeologists, and church officials including the Pope that the actual site of Jesus baptism is here (picture). This baptismal pool is called “Bethany Beyond the Jordan.” It is also proved by the scripture passage—John 1:28, “This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.”

(3)

Let's go back to today's passage. John the so-called Baptist lived in the Judean wilderness and proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And he used to baptize people who came to him here at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan. Again, his baptism was for repentance.

One day, by the way, among many people who came to him to be baptized, there was a man coming from Nazareth of Galilee. People knew Him as a son of a carpenter named Joseph, but no one knew who He really was. John baptized Him. When this man came up out of the water, people who gathered there and John the Baptist who baptized Him came to have mystical experience. This is what they experienced: "The heavens [are] torn apart and the Spirit [is] descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased'" (vv. 10-11).

Here, we come to have a question: "Why did Jesus who was sinless come before John the Baptist and have a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins?" We can have some different viewpoints and interpretations, but today, I'd like to focus on what happened after He was baptized. As described, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, and God proclaimed to the world that Jesus is His beloved Son. And then, Jesus's public ministry as the Son of God began. Before and after His baptism, the world's perception changed. The world knew Jesus as a son of a carpenter, but now it came to know Him as the beloved Son of God. That is why John the Baptist said, "I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel" (John 1:31). And before and after His baptism, Jesus also changed Himself. Before baptism, He did His job as a son of Joseph and Mary and as a carpenter; but after baptism, He did His job as the Son of God.

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In addition to Holy Communion, Baptism is a sacrament that we United Methodists recognize and perform during public worship. Some people misunderstand baptism as a ticket to heaven, so they believe they have a kind of insurance and do nothing for their faith journey. It is definitely not! Salvation is a lifelong journey of responding to God's grace and of becoming more Christlike. On this journey, baptism is the beginning of God's salvation work by cleansing us of sin, denying our old selves, and being born again as a new creation with Christ. Thus, water is a key element. Under the water, in the water, we die to our old selves; and above the water and out of the water, we have new life in the light of God's grace. Before and after baptism, we come to have totally different selves—the old selves have gone and the new selves have come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

I want to ask you some questions. Are you baptized? If not, what makes you hesitate to be baptized? If so, what is the meaning of baptism for you? Through baptism, have you experienced denying your self-oriented life and obtaining a Christ-centered life? Is there no change before and after baptism? What do you think is the reason? Today, I want to invite you—if you are baptized—to remember the moment of your baptism, moving of the Holy Spirit and holy grace through water upon your head, and your dedication to live as Jesus's disciples. For those who have not been baptized yet, I want to invite you to God's grace. Repent, be born, remain in full of love and grace of God, and live by the leading of the Holy Spirit. Amen.