

## **Sermon on Baptism as the Gateway to Communion**

**Sunday, Jan 23, 2022**

**Associate Evangelist: Sister Maydene Campbell**

I speak to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Today, we celebrate the Third Sunday after Epiphany. Epiphany, according to noted bible scholars, is a Christian feast day that celebrates the revelation of God incarnate (God in flesh) as Jesus. More specifically, epiphany primarily **commemorates the Magi's visit at the birth of Christ and the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist.**

As **followers of Christ**, we understand baptism to have a very special meaning. Throughout the Bible, we find that baptism exists:

### **- as a covenant between God and man**

This calls to mind the baptism of Moses (1 Corinthians 10:1–3) – when the Israelites were delivered from slavery in Egypt, they were “baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” That is, they were identified with Moses and his deliverance by passing through the Red Sea and following God’s presence in the cloud (Exodus 13:21).

### **-as a ritual connecting us with (the Old and New Testament) promises of God**

This calls to mind the baptism of the cross (Mark 10:35–39) – Jesus used the language of baptism to refer to His sufferings (and those of His disciples). James and John, the Boanerges, had come to Jesus asking for a place of honour in the kingdom. Jesus asked them, “Can you . . . be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” (Mark 10:38). They replied that they could, and Jesus confirmed it: “You will . . . be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with” (verse 39). The “baptism” Jesus speaks of here is the suffering He was to endure. James and John would suffer, as well. Similarly, many of us would agree that the Christian journey is punctuated with challenges which we can only surpass with God’s saving grace.

### **-a cleansing act (particularly immersion).**

The baptism of believers (Matthew 28:19) – this is a washing in water to symbolize the action of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s heart. Believer’s baptism is one of the two ordinances given to the

church. Different churches practice different modes of baptism be it in the form of immersion, affusion (standing in water while the same is poured) and aspersion (pouring).

Similarly, in the baptism of fire (Matthew 3:11–12) – John prophesied that Jesus would baptize men “with fire.” This speaks of Jesus’ judging the world for its sin (see John 5:22). Immediately after mentioning the baptism by fire, John describes Jesus as overseeing a harvest to come: “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (verse 12; cf. Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43).

**-as an acknowledgement and request for the remission of sins, Mark 1:4**

This was exemplified in the baptism of John (Mark 1:4) – as John the Baptist preached repentance of sins in preparation for the coming of the Messiah; he baptized people in the Jordan.

**-as a sacrament of admission to Christianity, 1 Cor 12: 13**

In the baptism of the Holy Spirit as shared in Ephesians 1:13–14; 1 Corinthians 12:13 – John predicted that Jesus would baptize men with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11). This is a spiritual baptism, and it is the baptism that saves us. At salvation, we are “immersed” in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit covers us, indwells us, fills us, and makes us a part of the spiritual body of Christ.

The baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13–17) – served as Jesus’ act of identifying with sinful humanity. Although Jesus did not need to repent of sin, He came to John to be baptized. John insisted that Jesus should be the one baptizing him (Matthew 3:13–14). But Jesus told John to proceed with the baptism: “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness” (verse 15). **This ultimately underscored the initiation of baptism as a sacrament for admission to Christianity.**

As Christians we further regard baptism **as a public witness/declaration of our commitment to serving God.**

Closer to home and through symbolic observation, the baptismal font is generally located close to an entrance or at a central location within the church to serve as a reminder that we are heirs of the eternal kingdom of God by virtue of our baptism – and further upon our departure, it beckons

for us to share God's promise of salvation with the world.

Today, with this in mind, I want to postulate that the most important element/output of being Baptised is **as an act of our obedience to God**. If you turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 28: 18-20, we read the Great Commission of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Beginning at v19 Jesus said 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

But what does our obedience mean to God? Let's turn to John. 14. In v[15] we read: If ye love me, keep my commandments. [21] He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and **will manifest myself** to him.

Here we find that **God interprets our obedience as our demonstration of our love for Him**. We mean **everything** to our Creator and He **looks forward** to our worship and obedience of Him. That tone of obedience equating love is so easily set here on earth. If you ask your spouse or child to perform a task, be it big or small, you expect it to be done. But on what premise? On the premise that they love you, and in loving you, they will listen to and obey you . God set that standard and baptism is one of his commandments, ensconced in the great commission. We say we are His followers, so it is incumbent upon us to obey Him/do like unto Him.

And how serious is this call to be baptized?

John 3:5 states, "**Noone** can enter the Kingdom of God unless he/she is born of water and The Spirit. Mark 16:16 reminds us, 'Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, He that believeth not shall be condemned.' Very serious indeed.

But the nuance and benefits of Baptism don't end there. For the greatest gift of baptism is that with that obedience, we are able to stand at the gateway to receiving the promise of Christ. For

Jesus said, Matt 28, **v20**. For Lo, I am with you **alway** (I love that He said alway, because alway to me conveys -all-the-way. Through thick and thin, up and down, good and not so good), even until the end of the world. What a promise! **Jesus is with us alway**.

**But we may ask, how can Jesus be with us alway, if He was resurrected and ascended to heaven? John 14 v 16** responds: “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you **another Helper ( so our first helper was- Jesus)**, that He may abide with you **forever**— 17 (our Helper is called) the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you (Christ’s followers) know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

**The Holy Spirit, the greatest gift of all.** Hence the significance and the symbolism of the Trinitarian invocation (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in the baptismal rite. It is with the Holy Spirit that we are baptized, not as John baptized with water, but Jesus baptized us all with our Helper, the Holy Spirit and fire.

For John said, “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I. . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” It is in this declaration that Then we realize, Jesus was never meant to be baptized with water. Instead, Jesus baptized us all, with his sacrifice and the subsequent release of the Holy Spirit and Fire.

So, we are now baptized. What does this require of us?

Once we have been made members of Christ through baptism, we will then need to feed on Jesus’ body and blood to continue to grow in faith in Him. Feeding on the body and blood of Christ is called Holy Communion. So, communion is the fellowship of believers when we eat the bread and drink the cup as partakers in the body and blood of Christ. Both are interdependent; baptism is the rite of entry and communion strengthens us through the ebb and flow of life.

The communion of believers signifies one body under Christ, one fellowship united by Christ, as He had to be broken for everyone to be made one. This act signifies friendship, as in the historical Jewish era, people eating together signified friendship, as this was a relaxed activity.

Jesus introduced the act with His disciples, where He shared His body and blood, and then said, **“Do this for the remembrance of Me”**. Communion is a fellowship of the community of Christ, where we collaboratively remember what He has done to bring humanity back in fellowship with God.

Baptism unites/fuels that fellowship, as Baptism is what “clothes us with Christ” in Galatians 3:27. It is the “admission” in the Faith that unites us and solidifies us as **one**. In order for us to fellowship, we must be one; just as we have the ingredients of a cake. Simply placed in the oven, they mean nothing, but with the aid of an emulsifying factor, they are bound together and when baked in an oven, produce a wonderful result. *Wisdom of The Holy Spirit*. My brothers and sisters, we are therefore bound by baptism into one body. 1 Corinthians 12: 13, clarifies, ‘ .. **“whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free and we were all given the one spirit.”** Ultimately as Christ’s followers, we have been blessed with One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.- Ephesians 4:5.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

