

The Rev. Kristin Krantz  
St. James', Mt. Airy  
1/10/16

Baptism of our Lord/E1C  
Isaiah 43:1-7  
Acts 8:14-17  
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;  
take our hands and work through them;  
take our hearts and set them on fire.  
Amen.**

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord, one of the four times in the church year set aside specifically for baptism, and with it we will baptize Emil John Ostrander and Henry Parks Bukszar.

As you might imagine on such a day, we read of Jesus' own baptism – this year Luke's version of the events.

And strangely enough, if you look closely, we don't actually see Jesus being baptized.

Even in the two verses missing from our reading today, Luke tells us this story by setting the stage, and then by showing what happened **after** *all the people were baptized*, including Jesus.

Part of this is a sidestep that the author of this Gospel does to avoid the question of why Jesus would submit to a baptism of repentance by John, especially if John is *not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals*.

But the theological shift Luke offers in place of the baptism itself is one that offers us a glimpse into what it means to live the life of a baptized follower of Christ.

*Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”*

After he was baptized, as he was **praying**.

Throughout this Gospel, Jesus is shown praying again and again. He prays before he calls the disciples, before asking them who he is, at the time of his transfiguration on the mountaintop. He prays before he teaches the disciples how to pray, on the night of his arrest, and at his death.

And for Luke, what was characteristic for Jesus would also be characteristic of the church.<sup>1</sup>

In the Acts of the Apostles, written by the same author, we are shown the church in prayer as it waits for the promised coming of the Holy Spirit. And after the Spirit comes to them at Pentecost (with wind and fire!), they continue the regular practice of prayer, seen repeatedly in nearly every chapter.

What is begun at baptism is lived out through the practice of prayer. Just as Jesus was empowered for and guided in his ministry through prayer, so too are his followers – us – down to today.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Hess, Homiletical Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 1*.

And that is why we gather as a community to baptize – on a Sunday, in worship, on a Feast day. In this way Emil and Henry are wrapped in our prayer before, during, and after the moments we splash in water and anoint with oil.

And it will be the work of their parents, and Godparents – of their Grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins – and indeed the work of everyone gathered here today, to teach them in the years to come how to pray.

And if that sounds daunting to you, you're not alone. Remember, those closest to Jesus turned to him to ask him to teach them how to pray – as if being in his presence wasn't enough for them to learn.

But it's also not complicated, or at least it doesn't have to be.

Start small. Add a table grace at meals. Pick one to learn by heart as a family, or get creative! Find a whole bunch you like online – or ask me, I've got a few lists compiled – and write them out on slips of paper and put them in a bowl on your table: a bowl of blessings to choose from at every meal.

Close the day with prayer. A prayer at bedtime is a wonderful ritual. There are many lovely ones to choose from, both spoken and sung. And while you can choose a children's prayer with little ones, you don't have to. One of the first prayers I taught my boys was from the Order for Compline in the *Book of Common Prayer*. I can still hear their preschool sing-song voices saying with me: *Keep watch dear Lord, over those that work and watch and weep this night.*

Teach gratitude – and lament. I hate to add the former, it's so overdone as to have become meaningless. But underneath the preciousness and platitudes, rooting prayer in gratitude keeps our eyes and hands and hearts open to the Spirit – and leads us into lives rooted in abundance rather than scarcity.

And yes, lament. Of all the types of prayer this is the one most often overlooked, and yet essential to our human experience. The Bible is full of lament, from the narratives to the psalms. Lament is the practice of turning over our questions, our anger, our bewilderment to God – it is asking *why, God, why?* – it is the powerful vulnerability of saying *I don't understand, but I trust: I trust that I am not alone and you are with me.*

For that is what we are promised in baptism. In baptism we call on the Holy Spirit to be present, and in this way God's abiding love is made known in water and oil and flame.

We baptize as a response and recognition of God's abiding love. And in so doing we name and claim our place within that love.

The Great Commandment that Jesus gave was to love one another as he loved us.

Part of loving one another is witnessing to each other *who* and *whose* we are.

That's why we're gathered here today, and it's what we do every Sunday when come together to pray, to hear God's word, to be fed at this table – all so we can be sent into the world to pray and love and serve.

Shortly we will gather around the font and the table. We will reaffirm our baptismal vows and invite again the Spirit into our midst. We will pray and we will hold out our hands that they may touch water and oil, bread and wine, *each other* in peace – all so that we remember and know the deep truth that we are God’s beloved and that God’s love abides – this day and always.

~ AMEN ~