



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Baptism of our Lord (B) – Acts 19:1-7

Focus: *The Gifts Received at Baptism*

word of life

“On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them....” (Acts 19:5-6a NRSV)

Read Acts 19:1-7

The first Sunday after the Epiphany is traditionally the Baptism of our Lord. The lessons overflow with baptismal themes. This is certainly true of the verses assigned for today from the Acts of the Apostles.

In the verses preceding the appointed reading from Acts 19, we hear of Apollos’ ministry in Ephesus. Apollos is described as “an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures” (Acts 18:24 NSRV) who spoke with “burning enthusiasm” and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus. (Acts 18:25 NRSV) It is clear, however, that Apollos was not fully versed in the Christian doctrine. The writer of Acts notes that “he (Apollos) knew only the baptism of John.” (Acts 18:25 NRSV) There is a wonderful scene where two faithful members of the Christian community in Ephesus (Pricilla and Aquila) take Apollos aside to instruct him and guide him to a more accurate understanding of the faith.

1. *Think of a time where someone instructed you in the faith.*
2. *How does the church “correct” or guide followers to a deeper understanding of the faith?*

Apollos leaves Ephesus and goes to Corinth. At the same time, Paul comes to Ephesus and remains there for over two years. (See Acts 19:10.) As Paul arrives, he meets some disciples. It becomes clear to Paul that these disciples have been instructed in the baptism of John, but they know nothing of baptism in the name of Jesus. Their understanding of what it means to be a believer is incomplete.

The distinction between the two baptisms is critical to the early church and is articulated in the Gospel of Mark. John the Baptist proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. (See Mark 1:4.) John’s baptism was one of cleansing in preparation for the One to come – Jesus, the Messiah. John clearly proclaims, “I have baptized you with water; but he (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:8 NRSV)

3. *What is the difference between a baptism of repentance and a baptism in the name of Jesus?*

Paul asks the disciples, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” (Acts 19:2 NRSV) They reply that they had not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. So Paul instructs them and baptizes them in the name of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit comes upon the newly-baptized believers.

4. *How have you experienced the Holy Spirit in your life?*
5. *Recall a baptism in your congregation. What are some words or phrases that are spoken when someone is baptized? Is the name of Jesus mentioned? What about the Holy Spirit?*

For Paul, baptism in the name of Jesus immerses and joins the believer into the church -- body of Christ. And it is in the church that the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies (to use Martin Luther’s words from the Small Catechism). We are empowered to do great things, and we experience God’s presence as we live and grow in the understanding of our baptism.

word among us

The question was probably heard in the past few weeks in school corridors, playgrounds, neighborhoods, and perhaps even in Sunday school classes. In the days after Christmas, we hear the question: “So, what did you get for Christmas?”

“What did you get?” may be an appropriate question to ask on this Baptism of our Lord Sunday as we think of the meaning of baptism. We know the ritual: the promise of sponsors, parents, and congregation to nurture and support the newly baptized; the prayers recalling the gift of water throughout the history of God’s people; the splashing of water; the mark of the cross; the lighting of the candle, reflective of the light shining in the life of the Christian.

1. *When and where were you baptized? What do you know about your baptism?*

You “got” all these gifts. But there’s something more – perhaps the most important gift of them all. You “got” the Holy Spirit. The invoking of the Holy Spirit permeates the baptismal liturgy. We pray, “Pour out your Holy Spirit, the power of your living Word.” We pray, “Sustain the baptized with the gift of your Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence.” We proclaim as the sign of the cross is made on the forehead of the newly-baptized, “Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.” (Evangelical Lutheran Worship – Holy Baptism, page 231)

It is the same Spirit that descended on Jesus at his baptism and that came to Paul and the early believers in the book of Acts. It is the same Spirit that descends on us at our baptism, that gathers us together as a community of faith. It is the same Spirit that inspires us to service and gives us the gifts needed for the tasks to which we are called. It is the same Spirit that instructed the first-century believers and that illuminates the Word today, giving us new insights and understanding. It is the same Spirit that comforts us in difficult times and challenges us when we become complacent.

What did you get at your baptism? The name: *Child of God*; the family: *the body of Christ*; the presence and promise of God: *the Holy Spirit*. That’s a gift list that will keep on giving all the days of our lives!

faith practice in daily life

Live Among God’s People

When we celebrate a baptism, promises are made. Parents and sponsors promise to help the baptized grow in the Christian faith and life. The gathered community promises to support and provide instruction in the faith. And God promises to be with us through the Holy Spirit. Bible study and discussions such as *Daily Faith Practices* provide opportunity for mutual instruction and growth in faith. It was in a faith community that Paul taught the new believers about baptism. It is in a faith community that we learn and live out our baptism.

2. *What does it mean for you to “live out your baptism”?*
3. *What gift(s) from your baptism do you hope you remember during the coming week?*

Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, come as you came to us in our baptism. Amen

last word

Remind yourself each morning, “I am a child of God.”

Daily Faith Practices

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

Copyright © 2012 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

May be reproduced for local, non-sale use provided the above copyright notice is included.

www.elca.org/faithpractices

Baptism of our Lord (B) Faith Practices Page 2 of 2