

January 10, 2021

Baptism of the Lord

First Sunday after Epiphany



St. John

United Church of Christ

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SECRETARY – JUDY HARTMANN

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Prayers and Liturgy by

Rev. Rosemary McCombs Maxey

NOTICE: Wednesday, January 6, was the “official” day of Epiphany. The story of the Three Kings or Magi is the central text for Epiphany. It is a time for commemorating the presentation of Christ to the World. The Psalm



for Epiphany is Psalm 72, which is a coronation psalm. It sustains the royal and triumphant language of this occasion. Early Christians applied this language as appropriate to Israel’s royalty but ultimately to “him who was born King of the Jews.”

TEXTS FOR SUNDAY, JANUARY 10:

Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11

CALL TO WORSHIP: *Psalm 29*

Give to our GOD, O heavenly beings,

Give to our GOD glory and strength,

Give to our GOD a glorious name;

worship our GOD in holy splendor.

The voice of our GOD is over the waters;

the God of glory thunders,

the LORD, over mighty waters.

The voice of our GOD is powerful;

the voice of our GOD is full of majesty.

The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;

Our GOD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

GOD makes Lebanon skip like a calf,

and Sirion like a young wild ox.

The voice of our GOD flashes forth flames of fire.

The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;

Our God shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

The voice of our GOD causes the oaks to whirl,
and strips the forest bare;
and in God's temple all say, "Glory!"

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;

Our God sits enthroned as ruler forever.

May our GOD give strength to the people!

May the LORD bless the people with peace!

INVOCATION:

Creating, Calling, and Faithful God,
we come to this time and place to be with you,
to worship you, and to learn from you.
May our time together be like your creation of light
in the darkness that you called good.
May it be that you would call us good while we
respond to your call and as we listen to you. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 19:1-7 Paul in Ephesus

"19 While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul took a route through the interior and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. ² He asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you came to believe?" They replied, "We've not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³ Then he said, "What baptism did you receive, then?" They answered, "John's baptism."

⁴ Paul explained, "John baptized with a baptism by which people showed they were changing their hearts and lives. It was a baptism that told people about the one who was coming after him. This is the one in whom they were to believe. This one is Jesus." ⁵ After they listened to Paul, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in other languages and prophesying. ⁷ Altogether, there were about twelve people."

MARK 1:4-11 John's preaching

⁴ John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. ⁵ Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. ⁶ John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He announced, "One stronger than I am is coming after me. I'm not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." ⁹ About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. ¹⁰ While he



was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. ¹¹ And there was a voice from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.”

MESSAGE: This Sunday, January 10, is the First Sunday after the Epiphany and tells the story of the Baptism of Jesus. If baptism is understood as a new beginning, then it is appropriate for the start of a new year. That also explains why the Common Lectionary First (Old) Testament text is Genesis 1. Psalm 29, which was read in the call to worship, contains a vivid portrayal of the union of natural storms with the voice and activity of God. It moves us closer to the account of Jesus’ baptism in Mark 1. That occasion was also one of disturbances in nature as well as a heavenly voice.

Today I also included the Acts 19 text for a few reasons. First of all, in our Zoom Bible Study every Tuesday evening from 7 – 8 pm, presently we are reading and discussing the book of Acts of the Apostles. (You are welcome to join us any time.)

When I first read Acts 19: 1-10, I was a little confused. When Paul was traveling the region to spread the word of Jesus as the Messiah, he found some Christian disciples in Ephesus. Evidently, they had been following John the Baptist before his execution, and they had been baptized by John.

Paul asked them if they had received the holy spirit when they were baptized by John. (Here’s the part where I was a little confused. Are there two different baptisms that we all need to receive?

The answer is yes and no. John the Baptist was offering the baptism of repentance. Mark 1: 4 “⁴ John

the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins.” That’s why it was called the Baptism of Repentance. However, it made no reference to the Holy Spirit.



However, when Jesus was baptized, he also received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as we can read in Mark 4:10-11 “¹⁰ While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. ¹¹ And there was a voice from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.’”

In the case of Paul and these disciples of John, Paul proceeded to baptize them with the Holy Spirit, as can be read in Acts 19:4-6, “⁴ Paul explained, ‘John baptized with a baptism by which people showed they were changing their hearts and lives. It was a baptism that told people about the one who was coming after him. This is the one in whom they were

to believe. This one is Jesus.’⁵ After they listened to Paul, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in other languages and prophesying.” This scene is reminiscent of what happened on Pentecost, Acts:2.

What about us? Do we need two baptisms, one for repentance and one for the Holy Spirit? No. In the UCC Book of Worship, baptism for children and adults, includes the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” and the promises that the person or their parents make during the ritual include words of repentance.

During the rite of confirmation, candidates renew the promises of baptism, including this prayer; “Almighty God, who in baptism received these your servants into the church, forgave their sins, and promised them eternal life, increase in them the gifts of your Holy Spirit.”

The Holy Spirit is also evoked during communion, during the reading of the Word, during ordination, and the installation of church leaders, and more.

So, I think we are covered. But the question is, do you recognize the Holy Spirit in your heart, in your being, in your life, and in your every day activities? That’s a discussion for another day.

May God bless all of you with the Holy Spirit every day. Amen.

And now we have a chance to renew those vows.

BAPTISM AND RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL VOWS

INTRODUCTION

Our God created new life forms and brought them up from the waters of chaos, embraced them, and called them good.

Jesus, baptized in the river Jordan by John the Baptist, became living water for us and embraces all of us. Jesus embraces those who are poor, oppressed, marginalized and all others who come seeking. We follow Jesus with our Baptism, marking a starting place for new life and new ways of being. We join Jesus in love and service. Let us prepare our hearts and minds to see, feel, and hear again the vows of Baptism.

RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL PROMISES (from Book of Worship)

Do you renew and affirm the promises made at your Baptism?

I do.

Do you recognize the call of God to be God's people always?

I do.

Do you embrace the way of Jesus in faith and ministry?

I do

Do you accept the nurture of the Holy Spirit who renews your spirit each day?

I do.

Do you accept and embrace others who seek a liberating faith in God?

I do.

In renewing your baptismal vows, remember your Baptism as a mark of acceptance and welcome into the care of Christ's church where you may begin again your Christian faith and life.

A UNISON PRAYER:

O God, we rejoice in your grace, given and received.
We thank you that you claim us,
that you wash us, strengthen us, and guide us,
that you empower us to live a life worthy of our calling. In the way of Jesus, make us as water in a dry and thirsty world. Establish us to be places of refreshment. Root us and nurture us in love, that with all your people, that we may rightly and justly serve you. Fill us with your fullness that our lives may overflow in service and love.
Amen.

OFFERING AND DEDICATION:

Faithful God, Bless us in our baptismal calling

to be in ministry of showing hospitality to others.

We offer the gifts that we have been given to be used not for conquest and dominance, but for use in liberating the poor and hurting people who pray for our liberation as well as their own.

Receive and multiply our gifts for life-giving ministry.
Amen.

BENEDICTION:

Thank you, God, for blessing us with memories of Jesus' baptism and ours.

Thank you for removing our reluctance, doubt, and fears, for replacing them with courage and commission. We go forth with your calling, direction, and blessing. Amen.

Service Prayers for Baptism of Christ Sunday was written by the Rev. Rosemary McCombs Maxey, a citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and is retired clergy and a member of Fellowship Congregational United Church of Christ, Tulsa, Oklahoma.



PRAYER LIST: We pray for the health and well-being of all affected by the pandemic and we especially pray for:

Rich Schmitt, Nelson Libell, Dave Seneczyn, Eric White, Lori Riess, Donna Isselhard, Mitch Nallie, Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess, Shari Hamilton, Becky Ballard, Amy Annis, Janice Petroff, Luz Captain, Craig Meyer, Pam (Belleville) Bierman.