

BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

YEAR C

ISAIAH 43:1-17

ACTS 8:14-17

LUKE 3:15-17, 21-22

JANUARY 12, 13, 2019

Who do we follow? We might answer proudly and without much thought that we follow Jesus. We call ourselves Christians and we are claimed by God. It is true that we are claimed by God but who do we follow? In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul responds to a message he heard about who people are following. Some are claiming to be Paul's people while others are Chloe's people and still others claim to belong to Cephas. His teaching says that the church is not divided according to who the pastor is or according to who was the founding pastor of a church. It is normal for us to have a favorite pastor or teacher but we do not follow those people. We respect them and we listen to the message but we do not follow them. We follow Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. He is God's Son.

Luke 3:15,16 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

There was some question about John and his identity. The people were expecting the Messiah and probably had been for hundreds of years. The prophets told about Messiah but the prophets had been silent for hundreds of years. John the Baptist is said to be the last of the Old Testament prophets. His message was similar to that of the prophets as he preached about repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

There are actually three eras in our walk of faith. There was the Old Testament prophetic era that ended with John's arrest and imprisonment. The second era

is what we celebrate today. The second era of our faith walk is Jesus and his baptism. The third era is our Lord's Ascension into heaven follow crucifixion and resurrection. You and I are living in the third era of faith.

We live in this third era and we might also live with a sense of expectation. We might also have questions about the Lord's coming. Many of us are expecting the second coming of Jesus at any time. This is why we get so worked up when someone claims to know the date and time when the Lord will come. We might be skeptical about such people but we are also curious about the message given. John came out of the wilderness with a message of baptism for repentance and forgiveness. Could this finally be the one? John's message certainly drew the attention of many Jewish leaders as well as others. John quickly answered that he is not worthy to be the Messiah. He is not even worthy to untie the sandals of the Messiah. Should the people follow John because of the message he gives? Many did continue to follow John even after he was imprisoned by Herod. Many followed John after Jesus was baptized and as he was about his ministry. Even when John said he was not the Messiah, people continued to follow him because of the message.

John preached that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The Holy Spirit would come upon all flesh and the church would be born. Then church would have the task of proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The church would also have the task of living out its baptismal covenant. The covenant of baptism says that we will be diligent in our use of the scriptures and that we would attend worship services along with other Christians. It says that we learn the ways of the church and that we work for justice and peace as we do our part to fight against oppression.

Luke 3:17 ¹⁷His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

As John speaks with his prophetic voice he teaches and preaches about judgment. He teaches about the coming judgment of God in ways that were similar to the prophets as they spoke about God's judgment of the Israelites. We hear this message from John and wonder about its meaning. We may not even like what John has to say about the Lord's winnowing fork and clearing the threshing floor. Some of you who are farmers or grew up as farmers know about the threshing floor and threshing machines. We might know more about modern day combines that harvest beans and corn. A combine picks the corn and beans putting the grain into a bin and discarding the chaff. The grain is important and is kept. The chaff is not worth anything and so is discarded.

John tells about the work of the Messiah. John teaches that Jesus will preserve what is valuable and destroy what is worthless, just as a farmer does. What is John saying about the Messiah? Does Messiah judge according to good and evil people or good and bad ways and actions of each person? John told about the unquenchable fire that will burn the chaff. We use fire to do a variety of things. We might use fire to heat our homes and cook our food. We also use fire to purify but also to destroy what is not needed or otherwise not valuable.

The Holy Spirit certainly inspires, teaches and empowers us so that we do ministry. The fire John talks about might be the fire of the Holy Spirit but is also a fire of judgment. It is a fire that burns the chaff. Jesus the Messiah will come and he will be our judge. Jesus comes and he shares good news with those that are broken hearted and otherwise in need. He comes to set the captives free. John preaches about repentance and forgiveness. Jesus also teaches about repentance and forgiveness. Jesus goes a step further as he proclaims good news. How can judgment be good news? When we come to repentance and forgiveness, judgment is good news. It is good news when we respond to God's grace by serving the Lord and changing the way we live. The primary goal of Jesus is to save the wheat. God does not look forward to burning the chaff. Jesus is our judge and Jesus will judge us. As we will hear

throughout this year, Jesus separates the sheep from the goats. He separates the grain from the chaff.

Luke 3:21, 22 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²²and 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.”

In our baptismal covenant you and I are set apart. We are set apart to bear fruit. That fruit is because Jesus is Lord. We bear fruit because we know Jesus came to the waters of baptism identifying with us and claiming us for the Kingdom of God. Christian baptism restores our lives. We that were dead in our sin have come to new life in and through Jesus Christ. Jesus was without sin. Jesus did not come to baptism in order to please God. God was already pleased before Jesus did any act of ministry. God is pleased with you and me before we have done anything for the church. The baptism of our Lord tells us that baptism is more than God's response to sin. Baptism is about rebirth. It is about being set on fire and sent on a mission for the Lord. Baptism means that we are claimed by Jesus as Lord and Savior. It is about being God's beloved children and filled with the Holy Spirit. AMEN