

## Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

<sup>15</sup>The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John could be the Christ. <sup>16</sup>John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But someone mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup>His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor. He will gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

<sup>21</sup>When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. While he was praying, heaven was opened, <sup>22</sup>and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with you.”

## Anticipation Fulfilled

### I.

We all have to do it from time to time. You have to wait. There is a certain sense of anticipation while you wait. You know something exciting is coming when that big day finally arrives. So you wait. You wait for your birthday to come, you wait for the school year to end, you wait for the next big holiday on the calendar.

Sometimes what you are waiting for is more than a few days or weeks, or even months, away. It might be set to arrive years down the road. Still you wait and you plan and you anticipate.

This particular waiting game had gone on as long as anyone could remember. In fact, as they waited, people talked to those of previous generations who had also waited expectantly. Even the grandparents could talk about *their* grandparents waiting for the same thing. So far, it hadn't happened.

But now, things just felt different, somehow. Perhaps it *was* really time for their expectations and their anticipation to be met. This new guy just exploded onto the scene. His demeanor and everything else about him seemed to meet the characteristics they were looking for in the one to come who would change everything.

“The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might be the Christ” (Luke 3:15, EHV). The wait had been going on for centuries. Really, the wait had been going on from the time Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden of Eden. Eve thought her firstborn might be the one God promised to deal with the deceptions of Satan once and for all, but the wait had just begun. Much later, God chose his special people to be the carriers of the promise; from their nation would come the final answer for sin. Still, they waited.

More and more prophecies taught the people what to look for. John certainly seemed, in their minds, to fit the bill. Perhaps they forgot certain things from their own history, like the words God spoke to Samuel in today's First Reading when Samuel was to reveal God's new choice for king of Israel. God said: “The LORD does not look at things the way man does. For man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7, EHV).

Indeed, in the early days after Samuel identified David as the Lord's anointed, David continued to be unpretentious and humble. So was John the Baptist in today's sermon text. “Someone mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals” (Luke 3:16, EHV). I'm not the one, said John. You will still have to wait a little longer.

### II.

The anticipation for the promise of the Messiah to be fulfilled was so high because the need was so great. Adam and Eve recognized the seriousness of their sin when they were driven out of the Garden; that's why Eve was so thrilled when she thought God had sent her Redeemer. King David, who was initially so humble, had to be reminded from time to time of his sin and his need for salvation. God promised that it was through his descendants that the Savior would come.

Anticipation for this same Savior still exists. Christians don't just look forward to Christmas for the lights that brighten the darkest part of the year, or tearing open the gifts to one another that lie waiting under the tree until that special moment arrives. Instead, our anticipation is all on celebrating the birthday of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Even though we know he already came, there is still a sense of anticipation in our hearts as we waited for Christmas. Even though we already know what happened on Good Friday and Easter Sunday, we wait with anticipation for the season of Lent to lead up to those momentous celebrations. Even though we knew what was coming in this very reading that is today's Gospel even before the words were spoken at the lectern, we waited with anticipation to hear about the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River.

The sense of anticipation was there because we have the same problem Adam and Eve had, and the people of Israel, and King David, and the crowd of people that watched and listened to John the Baptist. Sin is in the world. Sin permeates the world. Sin is destructive, not just of our relationships with one another, but our relationship with God. Sin separated us from God.

John the Baptist spoke to the people about the real Messiah who was to come. "I baptize you with water. But someone mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup>His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor. He will gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Luke 3:16-17, EHV).

There are three suggestions about what John might have meant by the baptism of fire: the first is the tongues of fire on Pentecost. A second is judgment. The final one is that fire is a metaphor for cleansing. Looking back at my sermons from the past on this very Gospel reading, I have used all three. Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit and fire seems to point to Pentecost specifically, and the cleansing that every sinner receives when faith in Jesus is created in his or her heart. Burning up the chaff certainly appears to point to Judgment Day.

Most important is that John the Baptist pointed, not to himself, but to the One who was still to be revealed to the people as the One promised by God for so long. Sin was still a problem for the people; they could see it, that's why they had such anticipation for the Christ, or Messiah. Sin is still a problem for you and me. Watch any newscast and you will see the effects of sin on the world. Look at your own life and you will be forced to admit that you aren't perfect. God demands perfection, so without the One mightier than John the Baptist you had no hope.

### III.

"When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too" (Luke 3:21, EHV). Did John know? Did he recognize the One more powerful he had said was still to come? Did he realize that very One was now standing before him? Luke's account doesn't say, but Matthew does. When Jesus came to be baptized: "John tried to stop him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?'" (Matthew 3:14, EHV).

John recognized that Jesus didn't *need* the baptism John was administering. Several verses before today's Gospel, Luke calls John's baptism "A baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3, EHV). Jesus didn't need forgiveness for his sins—he *had* no sins. The People's Bible volume on Luke reminds that the word "repent" in the Bible sometimes includes a call to faith. "John's preaching of repentance included both sorrow for sins and faith in the good news of forgiveness of sins" (Peoples' Bible, Luke, p. 35. [NPH.net](http://NPH.net)).

While the *people* needed to repent and believe in the Promised One whom John was about to baptize, *Jesus* wanted to be baptized for a different reason. In Matthew's account he tells John that reason: "Let it be so now, because it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15, EHV). Since he had no sins, Jesus didn't need forgiveness, but even then he was already taking our place as our Substitute and our Savior.

"Jesus was baptized too. While he was praying, heaven was opened, <sup>22</sup>and the Holy Spirit

descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with you’” (Luke 3:21-22, EHV).

The Bible doesn’t tell us the contents of Jesus’ prayer. It *does* say what happened next. The whole Triune God was on display. God the Son—Jesus—was there in the Jordan being baptized by John. The Holy Spirit descended from the heavens in the form of a dove. The Heavenly Father spoke.

In Old Testament Bible history there are many instances where someone was anointed to fill some office among God’s people. Kings were anointed; prophets were anointed; priests were anointed. There at the Jordan River, Jesus was installed into his ministry by John the Baptist. At his baptism God announced that he was the Promised One. Jesus would fill all three Old Testament offices; he would be Prophet, Priest and King to do what was necessary to pay for the sins of all and to restore our relationship with God.

#### IV.

Baptism is precious to us to this very day; not just Jesus’ baptism, but our own. John’s baptism of repentance included both sorrow over sins and faith in what Jesus did to win forgiveness for us. Jesus’ baptism was his installation into office as our Savior.

Today, baptism is still an anointing. Paul says to the Romans that “All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death” (Romans 6:3, EHV). In baptism and the faith the Holy Spirit creates in our hearts we participate in what Jesus has done for us through his death and resurrection. Baptism isn’t something *we* do or produce by our obedience to be baptized or to bring our children to be baptized. Baptism is a sacrament. A sacrament is something God does for us. The Apostle Peter says: “Baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the body but the guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21, EHV).

On the one hand, the waiting was over. When John baptized Jesus he could point to him and say: “Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, EHV). On the other hand, they still did not know how the history of God’s salvation would be completed.

We do. We have the rest of the story.

Even as the lights of Christmas begin to fade, we wait in anticipation for Lent to begin. There will be recounted again Jesus’ journey to the cross in the readings of the Passion History of Jesus in midweek Lenten services. Jesus indeed completed God’s plan of salvation to take away the sin of the world as the Lamb of God identified by John.

The Lamb of God was the perfect sacrifice for sins offered up on Good Friday. But Easter comes just days later to remind us that Jesus didn’t stay dead in the tomb. He rose from the dead as proof that the Heavenly Father accepted the sacrifice of the Lamb for our sins.

Remember that quote by Paul to the Romans? “All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death” (Romans 6:3, EHV). Paul went on. “We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life” (Romans 6:4, EHV). We share what Jesus won. Jesus defeated Satan for us. Walk in the new life Jesus won for you even as you wait in anticipation for him to bring you to your eternal inheritance. Amen.