

## Moore Presbyterian Churches January 8, 2023

### *Baptism of the Lord*



\*Indicates to please stand as you are able.

#### **God calls us to worship**

\*Call to worship (*responsive*):

From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same  
My name is great among the nations,  
and in every place incense is offered in my name,  
says the Lord. (Malachi 1:11)

**Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.** (Isaiah 60:1)

Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world.  
Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness,  
but will have the light of life.' (John 8:12)

\*Hymn: #385 "Like the murmur of the dove's song"

#### **We respond in praise and confession:**

Prayer of praise and supplication:

Creator God,  
you formed the heavens and stretched them over us;  
you spread out the earth and made it fruitful.  
From your glory, you came to us in Jesus, your Son,  
to touch the earth with healing and hope.  
We praise you for all the gifts you have given us  
in Christ and in creation.  
In the strength of the Spirit, we come to renew our commitment to you,  
to serve in the name of Christ Jesus,  
who is one with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and always. Amen.

Prayer of confession (*unison*):

**Merciful God,  
in baptism you promise us forgiveness and new life.  
We confess that we often prefer our old ways.  
We resist the new opportunities you set before us.  
We cling to harmful habits and nurse grudges,  
failing to forgive one another.  
Have mercy upon us, O God,  
and guide us to live with more grace and generosity through Christ  
our Lord.**

We hear the gospel of God's grace:

Friends, hear the good news of the gospel. Before the world was made, we were chosen in Christ to be part of God's family. God calls us to new life in Christ, so trust in God's forgiveness and grace. Turn and follow Jesus in repentance and joy.

\*Hymn: #183 "Christ, when for us you were baptized"

**God speaks to us**

To fulfil all righteousness

Thursday, January 5<sup>th</sup> was the 12<sup>th</sup> day after Christmas and the last day of the Christmas season. Friday, January 6<sup>th</sup> is known as the feast day of the Epiphany and marks the beginning of the Epiphany season, which takes us through to Lent.

An *epiphany* is a recognition or revealing of something which is normally obscured or unknown. The word is often used to describe the experience of suddenly connecting the dots of an intellectual puzzle and getting a clear idea of what had been blurred or confusing.

One might have an epiphany about how to turn your fridge full of leftovers into a delicious casserole.

In the Christian context, the word describes a manifestation of the ordinarily invisible – yet nevertheless real, good, and able – triune God.

“Epiphany” is when God becomes easily recognizable.

With the Christmas arrival of Jesus, we have been given The Epiphany.

Over the next few weeks, with the help of Isaiah’s Servant Songs and the Sermon on the Mount recorded for us in Matthew’s gospel, we’re going to reflect on Jesus’ purpose and ministry and how he enables us to recognize our God and enjoy our grace-given reconciliation with Him.

To set us on this quest, we begin where all Christian life and ministry begins: with baptism.

READ: Matthew 3:1-3, 11-17; 4:1, 17  
Psalm 2  
(*Read responsively: red pg. 494, blue pg. 489, Large Print pg. 835*)  
Acts 10:34-48.

**1.** To prepare the hearts and minds of the people to receive the Messiah: to receive the lordship of the King of David’s line, to accept the salvation of “Jesus” (meaning: the Lord is our salvation), to embrace the gift of “Emmanuel” (meaning: God is with us), the Lord God sent John to the banks of the Jordan River to preach a message of repentance.

When those who heard his message chose this path, John invited them into the river and either submerged them or poured water over them. This water baptism symbolized their spiritual cleansing and their readiness to live as citizens of the

Kingdom of God under the authority of the Messiah – the anointed King of David's line.

Baptism had long been celebrated as the initiation rite for Gentiles converting to Judaism. The water cleansed them of their former (sinful) life and they began anew.

What was different about John's baptism is that, like through the prophets of old – such as Elijah – through John, God called not only Gentiles to repentance but Jews as well. The call was for the people of the covenant, the people of the faith, as well as the proselytes and the seekers, to return to God and God's ways with all their heart, mind, and behaviours and thus to soften their hearts and be prepared to see, believe in, and accept the Messiah.

When Jesus arrived on the bank of the Jordan, John protested.

John thought that Jesus did not need to repent!

We don't know much about Jesus' life between his birth and now, some thirty years later. We know that as a toddler, with his parents Joseph and Mary, Jesus fled to Egypt and returned some time later to live in Nazareth in the province of Galilee. We know (through Luke's gospel), that Mary and Joseph, being faithful Jews, would travel to Jerusalem each year to celebrate the festival of the Passover. And we know that when he was 12 years old, Jesus decided to stay in the temple to learn from the teachers and clergy so that he could better perform his true Father's business. But, apart from that, most of his life is not a matter of public record.

It's left to speculation.

We can assume, that most of his life was not unlike the other ordinary lives of the citizens of Nazareth. Nothing overly remarkable. Certainly nothing which the writers of the New Testament considered worthy of including in their gospels and letters!

That being said, John evidently knew that Jesus was not an ordinary carpenter's son from Nazareth but was the one about whom he had been preaching and for whom he had been trying to prepare the citizens of Judea. John knew that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John knew that he will be (with the anointing of the Holy Spirit) the Messiah – the anointed king of David's line and royal Son of God whose heritage is the nations and whose possession is the ends of the earth.

Jesus is the one who should baptize John, not the other way around!

In answer to John's protest, Jesus exclaimed that it is necessary for him to be baptized by John "to fulfil all righteousness."

**2.** When the writers of the biblical books talk about righteousness, they refer to the standard of what is good and acceptable and life-giving as set by the living and triune God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As the creator of life itself, Yahweh alone sets the standards for what is acceptable for abundant and eternal life.

*Righteousness* refers to what is deemed to be acceptable, good, and holy by the Lord God.

*Righteousness* refers both to behaviour and character.

God's law describes the principles and boundaries for a life-giving, beautiful, and holy society. *Righteousness* therefore involves obedience to God's law as laid out in the terms of the various covenants.

*Righteousness* also refers to one's character. A person is *righteous* if, they are perceived by God to *be* good and holy.

**3.** When Jesus said that it is proper for him and John to fulfill all righteousness by him being baptized, he meant on one level that he, like all other Jews who were looking for the advent of God's tangible influence in their daily living, had to obey God's commandments. So, just as Paul praised him for his obedience even to the point of death on the cross, here, in obedience to the Father, Jesus submitted himself to John's baptism.

The first layer of meaning has to do with Jesus: the Son of Man, the Jewish human, the servant of God.

The second has to do with Jesus as the Son of God, as the Saviour.

Jesus came to reconcile humanity with our God. This is what Peter said in his sermon in Acts 10: "The message God sent to the people of Israel: peace by Jesus Christ." There cannot be peace on earth until all people – Jew and Gentile – are reconciled with the heavenly Father, with our Creator.

Jesus came to reconcile humanity with our God.

To do so, he has to do something about our sin and renew for us our right standing before God, our *righteousness*.

To do this, Jesus absorbed humanity's sin in himself. Hence, his death on the cross: the man who hung on the cross wasn't the pure innocent the thief took him to be! And, in some sense, John misread the situation: Jesus did have to repent because his whole life and ministry involved taking upon himself humanity's sin!

Jesus willingly took humanity's sin upon himself so that we would be made *righteous* before God. This is grace!

And, it didn't happen suddenly at Calvary.

It began in the Jordan River.

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*In his baptism, Jesus fulfils our righteousness.*

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So that the heavenly Father would view us not as rebellious sinners but as His beloved sons and daughters, Jesus fully identified with the sin of humanity and was baptized.

4. In some of the baptismal rites of the early church, the person being baptized would begin on one side of the water, shed the clothes they arrived in, walk through the water, then be clothed in robes of white on the other side.

When we are baptized, as was Jesus, we are anointed by the Spirit of God and clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

As such, we are named beloved Sons and Daughters of God-in-Christ.

Thus clothed, and thus anointed, we are equipped with the same Holy Spirit to go about "doing good and healing all who are oppressed by the devil" in obedience to God's law and Christ's teaching, by the power of the Holy Spirit who indwells us, and giving the credit always to the Living and Triune God.

Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of his work. When he came out of the water, the Spirit of God anointed him as the divine Son, he was driven into the wilderness to face all the challenges and temptations the devil throws in our way, he proclaimed repentance because of the nearness of the kingdom of Heaven, he healed all manner of diseases and oppressions, he forgave sin on the cross and reconciled us with our Father in heaven.

So too baptism is the beginning of our life in Christ. Clothed in Christ's righteousness, named by the Father in heaven, and anointed by the Holy Spirit to

testify to the presence of the Kingdom of Heaven and continue Christ's ministry in our present reality.

For the sake of God's holy name, for the good of our societies, and for the health of our souls.

Amen.

**We respond by affirming our faith, offering our tithes, and prayer:**

*I'd like to invite you to stand as we, in response to God's Word, affirm our faith by the Apostles' Creed.*

\*The Apostle's Creed (*unison*):

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen.**

\*Offering:

*(Offering plates are presented at the Communion Table while congregation sings:)*

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
praise him all creatures here below;  
praise him above, ye heavenly host;  
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost**

Prayer of dedication

Prayers of thanksgiving, intercession, and the Lord's Prayer:

Loving God,  
you invite us to bring to God our doubts and fears,  
our joys and concerns, our petitions and our praise.

We thank you that you are with us in every circumstance,  
and that you walk with us through times of celebration and sorrow.  
This day, we open our hearts to you,  
knowing your Spirit prays in us with sighs too deep for words.

Where people are tired from work or weary with responsibility;  
where time and resources feel inadequate and costs overwhelming,  
send your Spirit with strength and renewal...

God, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**



Where people are facing danger or living under duress;  
where people are persecuted for who they are or what they believe,  
send your Spirit with courage and comfort...

God, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Where people have suffered the loss of love or purpose;  
and where love seems complicated and challenging,  
send your Spirit to bind up the brokenhearted...

God, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Where people are ill and worry for their future;  
where people suffer pain or disability and long for healing;  
and where people face the limits to life and options have run out,  
send your Spirit with healing and hope...

God, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Where people seek a reliable friend, a true comforter or wise adviser;  
where the lonely long for company to cheer them,  
and where isolation makes people doubt their value to others,  
send your Spirit of wisdom and companionship...

God, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Where new life is beginning and hope dawns;  
where there is laughter and joy, healing and positive change,  
where there is good news to celebrate  
and opportunities open up for the year ahead,  
send your Spirit with rejoicing and gratitude...

God, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

These things we pray in Jesus' name, gathering our prayers into one voice in  
the words he taught us:

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**God sends us with God's blessing:**

\*Hymn: #342 "All who the name of Jesus bear"

Benediction

Congregational Amen