

**First Sunday after Epiphany – January 13, 2012**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

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

**The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. 16) John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 17) His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."**

**21) When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened 22) 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; with you I am well pleased."**

In the name of the Christ – the anointed one my dear Christian friends:

Anticipation or waiting expectantly is a normal part of our lives. Sometimes our expectations are fulfilled and sometimes we end up being disappointed. In our text for this morning we were told that people were waiting expectantly and wondering -- they were wondering if John the Baptist might possibly be the Christ. I suppose in a way they might have been disappointed to discover that he wasn't... but John told them to continue their eager waiting because the Christ would come.

The Christ was the title they used to speak about the Savior God had promised to his people. John's preaching and his message of repentance and forgiveness was a message unlike any these people had heard before. John was quick to point out that he was not the Christ or the Messiah as some of the people were hoping. John was also quick to point out that they shouldn't be disappointed because the Christ was coming soon and he would be more powerful than he was. John points us to Jesus and encourages us to

**Theme:** Behold Christ the Anointed One

1. The one anointed to be Savior and Judge
2. The one anointed to take our place

**The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.** We might wonder why the people were waiting for and anticipating the arrival of the Christ and why his coming was so important to them.

Previously Luke has given us a pretty detailed description of the timing of John's ministry. It was a time when a foreign ruler was in control. That fact may have caused some of the people to recall an OT prophecy and blessing spoken by Jacob to his son Judah: (Genesis 49:10) **The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.**

The kingly line from Judah extended from the time of David until its final departure under the Roman government Surely there must have been those who thought that God's chosen ruler would soon appear now that the scepter had departed from Judah – in fact we know that many were looking for the politically restoration of Israel as a nation. The political situation combined with the unique message of John had the people wondering if he might be the Christ – even though John himself wasn't from the kingly line of Judah and David and even though no miracles had been done by him. John no doubt was aware of the conversations the people were having. Perhaps he had heard them wondering out loud about whether or not he was the Christ. John's work of preparing the people for the coming of the Christ was successful. They were waiting eagerly for the Christ to come.

Why was his coming so important to them? Or to put it another way: "What is the meaning and implications of the word Christ?" We frequently hear the words Christ and Messiah. Both are used as titles given to Jesus. Both mean the anointed one. Christ is the Greek or NT word. Messiah is the Hebrew or OT word.

In the Old Testament times God frequently identified his chosen leaders such as a prophet, a priest or a king by having someone anoint them by pouring oil on their heads as we heard in the OT lesson for today where God sent Samuel to anoint David as the future king of Israel. It would take a number of years before this youth would become king but he was the one God had chosen.

Anointing was the Lord's indication that they were his chosen one. Those the Lord chose he would also equip and empower for their tasks. At times those individuals would have to wait a period of time until the Lord would place them into their positions – the process might be compared to our election process in a way. We choose someone for an office in November but it isn't until the next January that they are inaugurated or sworn into that office.

God's own son had been chosen by the Lord to be the one who would rescue men from their sins. Already in the OT Scriptures his work is described in kingly terms, in high priestly terms and in prophetic terms. He had been chosen but the time had not yet come for him to assume his office. But things were changing and now John the Baptist urges us to behold the Christ the one anointed to be our Savior and Judge.

In answer to the peoples musings **John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.** John humbly admitted his need for a Savior by calling himself unworthy to undo the Lord's shoe laces. He also called attention to some differences between his work and Jesus' work. Jesus was more powerful than he. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. It conveys the blessing of forgiveness for Jesus' sake. Jesus would directly baptize his followers with the Holy Spirit. Perhaps when we hear about a baptism by fire we are reminded of the events of Pentecost when Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to his disciples and empowered them to proclaim the good news of his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead in languages understood by people from around the world.

Jesus is the one who whom God had chosen to be the Savior of all. But the reference to a baptism by fire could also be a reference to Jesus role as the judge of all. John speaks of that role in his next verse. **17) His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."**

The picture of a farmer processing his wheat was familiar to those living at time of John the Baptist. When the wheat was harvested the stalks were taken to the threshing floor where they were beaten to break off the husk of the wheat as well as any other parts of the wheat that were unusable. Sometimes an ox would walk over the wheat to help with this process. Things were allowed to dry and then the farmer would take a winnowing fork (a shovel could work too) and start tossing the mixture into the air. The breeze would blow away the light dry parts leaving behind the heavier kernels of wheat which would be ground into flour. The stubble and chaff the useless shell would be gathered and burned. (Today of course the mechanical combine does much of this work.)

The Scriptures frequently remind us that in this world believers and unbelievers are mixed together. They will be separated when Jesus returns as judge. Believers will be granted the gift of eternal life with the Lord and the unbelievers those who rejected Christ and wanted nothing to do with him will be eternally separated from him forever. That's the point that John is making with this comparison.

Savior and Judge – that's what Jesus the Christ would be. He was chosen for those tasks by his heavenly Father – tasks that coincide with his role of prophet, priest and king.

Let's talk just a bit more about Jesus' anointing as our Savior. In order to be our Savior he had to take our place. That means that Jesus had to place himself under God's law. That means that Jesus had to keep that law perfectly for us. That means that Jesus had to die in our place. And that death included suffering the eternal punishment we deserved for our sins. Jesus became our substitute – one of the most beautiful and poetic of all the passages in the Bible which speak of Jesus work as our substitute is the OT prophecy from Isaiah 53. (Isaiah 53:5-6) **But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6) We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

Other passages in the Bible also speak about this wonderful truth. There's Hebrews 2:14 **Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil—and of course there's also 2 Corinthians 5:21 **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.****

Our text provides an example of Jesus identifying himself with those he came to save. **When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.** Why was Jesus baptized? We know it wasn't because he was a sinner – remember that passage from 2 Corinthians which told us Jesus had no sin but came to be sin for us. That passage also explains why Jesus was baptized.

Jesus wasn't baptized because he needed baptism for himself but because he had come to be one with us. At His Baptism He was being numbered with the transgressors – being counted as a sinner – since he had come to bear the sins of us all.

And at his baptism Jesus was visibly anointed with the Holy Spirit – Jesus the son of God had just been baptized and then Luke tells us **as he was praying, heaven was opened 22) 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; with you I am well pleased.**

Although the emphasis of our sermon for today is on the anointing of Jesus one just has to call attention to the mention of the three persons of the Holy Trinity in this passage. Jesus, God the Son, had just been baptized. He marked this as an occasion for prayer – perhaps seeking the Father's blessing as he would embark on his public ministry after publicly demonstrating his oneness with sinners. As if in answer to his prayer the heavens were opened. In some wonderful and miraculous way those who were standing there saw the glories of heaven. They also saw the Holy Spirit – in the form of a dove – descending upon Jesus. Those were the visuals and now for the audio – the voice of God the Father – speaking from heaven and declaring to Jesus: **"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."** There's the affirmation – the Father is pleased with his Son. He's pleased with the 30 years of perfection under the law that Jesus lived for us. He's pleased with his willingness to become one with us as demonstrated it in his baptism. He's pleased with his intention to begin a public ministry during which he will give glory to his heavenly Father and he's pleased with his Son's willingness to go on to die for all sinners.

The words were an encouragement for Jesus – just as we're encouraged when our parents tell us they love us and say how proud we've made them or when a boss or a teacher tell us – great job, way to go. But the words weren't only meant for Jesus. Others heard them as well, just as others had seen the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus.

What do those words mean for us? That's another question we can use as we study Scripture and often the Scriptures will provide and answer for us. Both the Old and the NT speak of Jesus being anointed by the Holy Spirit to assure us that he truly is the one chosen to be Savior and judge, chosen to take our place and earn eternal life for us. God spoke about his servant Son in Isaiah 42:1 **"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.**

(Acts 10:37-38) **You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached--how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.**

This wonderful vision reported by Luke and observed by John the Baptist assures us that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the anointed one, our only Savior. And it assures us that because the Father is pleased with Jesus and his intentions that the Father is also pleased with us for Jesus' sake. After all Jesus is acting in our place!

This wonderful event served as a confirmation for John Baptist and others including ourselves that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Christ. According to John's Gospel sometime after the baptism of Jesus, John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching the crowds of people at the Jordan River and he proclaimed: said, "**Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.**" Then John gave this testimony: "**I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.**" (John 1:29-34)

In Luke's account of Jesus' Baptism we have seen the Christ – the one anointed to be Savior and Judge and the one anointed to take our place. As we spoke of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit being present at Jesus baptism perhaps we were reminded that we also were baptized in the name of the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One could really say that Jesus baptism gives meaning to our baptism. Our epistle lesson for today helps us make that connection. (Titus 3:4-7) **But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5) he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6) whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7) so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.**

Notice Paul reminded Timothy that we are saved because of the mercy of God who sent his son to take our place – to do righteous things for us. And the blessings that Jesus won for us are poured out on us through the washing of rebirth and renewal which we know as baptism – here's Jesus at work for us as John had pointed out -- He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

Because Jesus was anointed to take our place – we enjoy the status of being heirs of eternal life – in baptism we've also been anointed. God has marked us as his sons and daughters, setting us apart to serve him for time and for eternity.

The people mentioned in the beginning of this text were anticipating the arrival of the Messiah, the Christ in part because of their familiarity with the OT Scriptures. They were eagerly waiting for Jesus to come.

Each week in our worship services Jesus comes to us through his Word. He comes to us frequently through his sacrament. Does eager anticipation describe our attitude towards next week's worship? There's no reason why we should not have the same joy and eagerness that the Psalmist expressed: (Psalms 122:1) **I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."**

Sometimes it helps us to get excited about something if we get just a glimpse of what's going to take place. Isn't that the reason why we are shown pre-views of the next episode of a program on TV as this week's episode comes to a close? So how can we get a glimpse of our worship next week and the message Jesus will share with us? How can we prepare ourselves to better understand what will take place next week? One way is to simply read the Scriptures that will be used next week – that's why they are frequently printed in the announcement section of the news and notes in your worship folder. And ladies if you don't have another

commitment at 1:00 on Thursday afternoons you could join us as we get together to discuss the Gospel lesson which will be part of the following Sunday's worship service.

In our worship services we're introduced to each of the lessons for the day. The sermon often answers questions we may have about one of those lessons. Our Sunday Bible study gives us the opportunity to dig deeper into the Lessons for the day as we ask our own questions and explore the rest of Scripture to help us better understand those lessons. The more familiar we are with God's word the more excited we will become about his promised coming at the end of time and the more eager we will be to come here to the Lord's house.

You know we're still at the beginning of a new year – close enough to make a resolution with God's help to worship here as often as possible – hopefully each week unless we're worshipping with another group of Christians elsewhere. May God bless us as we eagerly anticipate and prepare to worship him each week as his anointed children and as heirs of eternal life! That is what we are because Christ was anointed as our Savior and to take our place.

Amen.