

Closing Prayer

Open the heavens,
almighty Father,
and pour out your Spirit
upon your people gathered in prayer.

Renew the power of our baptismal cleansing
and fill us with zeal for good deeds.
Let us hear your voice once again,
that we may recognize in your beloved Son
our hope of inheriting eternal life.

Grant this through Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
in the splendour of eternal light,
God for ever and ever.

*Opening prayers*²

CPL • LBC Year C Epiphany 1.odt • 2022-01-07

² *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.

Baptism of Christ (First Sunday of Epiphany)

Sunday between 7 and 13 January inclusive

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 43.1-7	God promises: rivers shall not overwhelm you
Psalms 29	The voice of the Lord is upon the waters
Acts 8.14-17	The Holy Spirit is given with the laying on of hands
Luke 3.15-17,21,22	Jesus is baptized by John

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Jesus is baptized by John

(In the wilderness John proclaimed a baptism of repentance.) ¹⁵As 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. 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.'

²¹Now 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.'

Luke 3.15-17,21,22 NRSV¹

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

The ministry of John the Baptist begins in 3.1. We are given here the third and last part of John's message, which is a response to those who wanted to identify him as the Christ. John distinguishes himself from the Christ in three ways: (a) John is not worthy even to be a slave of the mightier one (3.16); (b) the Christ will baptize not with water but with the Holy Spirit and with fire – anticipating Pentecost (3.16); (c) the Christ will bring judgement (3.17). Luke here, and throughout his gospel and Acts identifies the Holy Spirit as the hallmark of Christianity. Do you agree? It should be noted that the Holy Spirit was a mark of Jesus' work and that of the church (24.49; Acts 1.85; 2.38; 10.47) but not of the community created around John the Baptist (3.16; Acts 18.24-28; 19.1-7).

The focus shifts from John the Baptist to Jesus as Luke mentions the baptism. Luke does not mention the place of baptism (although the Jordan was named in 3.3), nor the one who baptized Jesus. At 3.20 (omitted from our reading) he mentions that John is already in prison, so removing him from the narrative. Luke gives minimal attention to Jesus' baptism, mentioning it along with the baptism of others. Was the early church embarrassed about Jesus having been baptized at all? Matthew gets round this by describing a glorious event, a revelation of the Trinity (Matthew 3.13-17). Luke places such a revelation after the baptism (3.21). Firstly, 'the heavens were opened' (3.21). Secondly, the Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus, and thereafter marks his ministry (4.1, 14, 18 and many others) and will be his gift to the church. The phrase 'in bodily form' (3.22) is unique to Luke – perhaps it is there to emphasise the certainty of the experience (compare Luke's risen Christ eating fish, (24.42-43). The third part of the revelatory experience is the voice from heaven (3.22): 'you are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased', combining Psalm 2.7, used at the coronation of Israel's king as son of God, with Isaiah 42.1, a description of the servant of God. In agreement with Mark, the voice is addressed to Jesus and not to others as a public announcement, as in Matthew. Note the reference in 3.21 to Jesus praying. The prayer life of Jesus is important to Luke (3.21; 6.12; 9.18-22; 9.28-29; 11.1; 22.32, 41; 23.34, 46), as is also the prayer life of the church (Acts 2.42; 3.1; 4.31; 6.4; 12.12; 13.3).

Quotations

1

Love is friendship set on fire.

Jeremy Taylor, 1613–1667

2

Before we go to our knees to receive the Baptism of Fire, let me beg of you to see to it that your souls are in harmony with the will and purpose of the Holy Spirit whom you seek.

William Booth, 1829–1912

3

Those in whom the Spirit comes to live are God's new Temple. They are, individually and corporately, places where heaven and earth meet."

Simply Christian: why Christianity makes sense / N. T. Wright. 2006

Related topics

For further study:

Trinity; christology; baptism; Holy Spirit; Father; manifestation