

Sermon Notes: Jan 12, 2025

[Lectionary Readings](#)

Focus: the story of the Baptism of Jesus in Luke

We are in Year C of the Lectionary. Year C started on the first Sunday of Advent, 2024, and will end on Nov 23, 2025. This Sunday is the first of the “Epiphany Season.” We hear more from the Gospel of Luke in Year C than in the other years. Today is about the Baptism of Jesus which occurs in all four gospels, so what’s special about Luke?

Jesus’ baptism does not have John the Baptist baptizing Jesus. John talks about Jesus right before but does not explicitly baptize Jesus. Kind of weird right? Instead of baptizing, John is in prison. Why does Luke tell the story of the baptism of Jesus with a crowd getting dunked and a genealogy instead? Here is the text with John’s imprisonment for context

When John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother’s wife, and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison. When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened 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.”... Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph the son of Heli (insert long genealogy list)...the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

I can’t be exactly sure, but I think Luke wanted to be very clear that Jesus is the fulfilment of a long hatching plan for Jesus to be prophet and messiah (hence the genealogy). Also, John is not crucial for Luke to tell the story as he was literally in jail. *Each gospel writer tries to downplay John’s role ...so it is not too wild to think Luke would not place John at the Baptism.* The weight of the other Gospels still has me thinking of John being at the baptism, but as an exercise let’s imagine the baptism on Luke’s terms.

Getting out of the weeds, Luke writes about the wide scope of the Holy Spirit throughout Israel’s history and how the long arc continues in Acts of the Apostles (Luke’s second book). Jesus ties it all together with the Father, Spirit and people as part of one cohesive drama. There might have been a third book that Luke wrote after Acts of the Apostles, but that has been lost to history.

Key Themes in Luke’s Gospel account:

Solidarity with Humanity: Jesus’ baptism among “the people” is about his solidarity with humanity and his role as the Son of Man without the necessary blessing of John.

Emphasis on the Holy Spirit: Luke frequently emphasizes the Holy Spirit. The Spirit descending on Jesus here signals the beginning of a Spirit centered and powered mission.

Jesus as Beloved Son: The heavenly voice in Luke confirms Jesus’ identity: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22).

Karoline Lewis of WorkingPreacher.org writes about the Spirit's relationship to Baptism:

Reading the Gospel of Luke through the lens of the Spirit's role generates the following, yet only a sampling, of the Spirit's presence:

- Conception (1:35)
- Magnificat (1:46-47)
- Zechariah (1:67)
- Leads Jesus into wilderness (4:1)
- Empowers Jesus' ministry (4:14)
- Jesus rejoices in the Spirit (10:21)
- Conferred through prayer (11:13; compare Mt 7:11)
- Jesus commits his spirit to God (23:46)
- Luke ends the Gospel with Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit (24:47-49)
- Pentecost (Acts 2)

The second person address to Jesus by the voice from heaven is the same as in Mark but in Luke it seems to have a different meaning. Whereas in Mark, such secrecy plays into the general cover-up about Jesus' identity; in Luke, that Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit appear to be the only ones present at the baptism foreshadows a similar moment at the crucifixion, a "last word" found only in Luke (23:46). There is promise in the presence of the Spirit here and at the end of Jesus' life that will be true for all believers.

Community and the Individual Luke's account of Jesus takes pains to describe Jesus as one who does not need validation from John or anyone else except God. I have debated whether to share a teaching that has been meaningful to me. The teaching is not especially shocking, but I think very easy to misconstrue as simply "go with your gut."

The quote below is about an abiding trust involves your gut and your heart and your head. Can we be a little bit less concerned with how others might interpret our life for us? Can we be little more attentive to with listening for the path that the Holy Spirit calls us to? The following quote comes from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition and is part of the Lojong Slogans that I often turn to when I struggle with a decision.

"Of the two witnesses, hold the principal one," is saying that one witness is everybody else giving you their feedback and opinions (which is worth listening to, there's some truth in what people say) but the principal witness is yourself. You're the only one who knows when you're using things to protect yourself and keep your ego together and when you're opening and letting things fall apart, letting the world come as it is – working with it rather than struggling against it. You're the only one who knows. *Start Where You Are : A Guide to Compassionate Living* by Pema Chodron,

In the Spirit of Luke's reading, trust the Spirit, trust yourself, and trust that you are a beloved with whom God is well pleased. **Todd**