

Grace, mercy & peace from God our father & our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice anything odd about our Gospel reading from Luke on this feast of the Baptism of Our Lord?

I'll give you ***a hint***; the name of our feast day is a bit misleading – it's a misnomer. Anyone?

What's the one thing that Luke does not actually describe?

The one thing Luke does not describe is ***Jesus being baptized***.

Luke ***doesn't tell us where Jesus is baptized***. Luke ***doesn't tell us who baptizes Jesus***. The tradition that ***Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan by John comes from the other Gospels***, but ***it's not in Luke***. Jesus' baptism isn't even narrated in the present tense. Instead it says, "*Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized.*"

What exactly does Luke intend to convey by mentioning Jesus' baptism in the past tense?

Reading the sweep of chapter three some definite themes emerge:

In Luke ***John the Baptist emphasizes Jesus' absolute superiority to himself***.

- He is "more powerful than me";
- ***John is unworthy*** by comparison even to perform the duty designated to only the lowliest slave – untying the thongs of one's sandals.
- ***The stronger one has a different baptism***. John baptized with water. "*He will baptize you in holy wind and (holy) fire.*" Only Luke includes "fire" as part of his description of Jesus' baptism.

The rather obvious conclusion is that ***Jesus*** – the coming One – ***is so amazing, powerful, stupendous, even "holy" that He makes John***

the Baptist look like chopped liver.

Next, *Luke conveys that John is imprisoned because of his righteousness.*

After all this, Luke mentions Jesus' baptism after the fact.

What does Luke want to convey by making Jesus' baptism barely unremarkable?

Precisely this, **the act – Jesus' baptism – is not nearly as important as what comes after it.** What Luke highlights is what happens after the fact:

1. Jesus prays;
2. The Heavens are opened;
3. The Holy Spirit comes down in bodily form; stays with Him.
4. God declares that God is well pleased with Jesus; note that Jesus hasn't done anything to speak of yet. God's affection for Jesus precedes Jesus' acts of power, righteousness, and obedience.
5. Jesus work begins.

The unmistakable conclusion that Luke leaves us with is: ***Even though Jesus eclipses John the Baptist in every way, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus is unmistakably crucial to Him undertaking the work of God's kingdom.*** It is the *sine qua non* – “That without which” Jesus cannot complete His ministry.

Considering that the Holy Spirit falls upon the Church on Pentecost in Acts, which is also written by Luke, we are ***meant to ascribe the same standards of importance to our Baptisms***, the critical gift of the Holy Spirit at Baptism, and the ministry of God's Kingdom towards which we are called to work.

What happens to Jesus, happens to the disciples in Acts – they are ***radically empowered for their new life and ministry***. Within a matter of days, the disciples who have been cowering behind locked doors for fear of the Jewish authorities and the Romans suddenly become the boldest, most intrepid (unafraid) and effective witnesses to share the Good News of God's love, mercy and forgiveness that the world has ever known.

- Before they are afraid; after they are fearless;
- Before they are powerless; after they perform amazing feats;
- Before they don't know what to say; after they speak with conviction.
- Before they want to go back home and take up their fishing nets; after they want nothing more or less than to make Jesus known to the world.

Is the descent of the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Holy Spirit, reliance upon the Holy Spirit really that critical?

Yes! It is.

Luke makes no bones about it. ***Without the descent of the Holy Spirit, Jesus*** – though He is the Anointed One, beloved of the Father, well pleasing in God's sight and exponentially greater than John or any other that came before him – ***without praying for and waiting for the Holy Spirit all that follows will not happen.***

But with the Holy Spirit, Jesus will change the world forever.

- He will redeem humanity – us – from hands too strong for us;
- ***He will walk fearlessly***, without thought for Himself, to the cross and His own death to destroy the power death yields over us;

- He will break the bonds of the evil one and crush hell underfoot;
- Jesus will win for God a Holy People;
- give light to the righteous, establish His Holy covenant, and show forth the resurrection.

If Jesus must have the Holy Spirit for His work, how much more must we who pale in righteousness even to John the Baptist need to pray for and wait for the Holy Spirit. It is the *sine qua non* – “that without which” we cannot successfully fulfil our baptismal calling. ***The descent of the Spirit upon Jesus was an anointing (and empowering) for his ministry on earth. Too often, I'm afraid, the Holy Spirit has become for us a topic of discussion, rather than a power for ministry.***

The coming of the Holy Spirit does not make Jesus the Son of God; Luke has told us who Jesus is from the time of the annunciation. ***The Holy Spirit comes to empower Jesus for his ministry.***

Luke doesn't convey Jesus' baptism this way just to tell us what happened to Jesus. ***He does so to indicate something about our baptism,*** about ***our need to be in prayer,*** about our need to wait for the Holy Spirit, ***about the power the Holy Spirit offers us,*** and about our absolute dependence on the Spirit in the battles God calls us to confront with evil and in ministry in the world.

Make no mistake. Through Baptism we are all made “beloved of God.” But if we want to do God's work in this world, we need to pray for, wait for, and depend on the Holy Spirit every day.

Amen!!!