



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Baptism of Our Lord

January 12, 2025

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Eight

Today's festival rejoices in God's blessings. We recall and celebrate our adoption as God's children, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the promised company of almighty God when we "pass through the waters . . . the rivers . . . fire." On this day the heavens open again for this assembly, and we receive the gift of God's Beloved, Jesus, in bread and wine.

We at Grace Lutheran Church strive to reflect and proclaim the love of God shown to us by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit by providing an inclusive and supportive environment through loving care and community service.

A warm welcome to all who are worshipping with us in person or online! We appreciate your contribution to the community today: with your voice, your presence, and just the blessing that you are. May you be nurtured by God's Word, empowered by the love of Christ, and stirred by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in this service this day, for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Grace Lutheran Church worships, prays, and serves on the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the hən̓q̓əmiñəḥ (Musqueam) and Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) speaking peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather together in worship to ascribe the glory due to God's name, full of beauty and holiness. For the Lord our God has a powerful voice that spoke all of creation into being, declares love and grace on all people, and leads us all into community and salvation. And so we are here to sing praises to God, recognize the strength we are given, and honour this God who graciously grants us peace and blessing, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

GATHERING SONG: Christ, When for Us You Were Baptized (#304)

GREETING

The welcoming grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the absolute love of God, and the accepting fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

CANTICLE OF PRAISE (p. 185)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God, through the gift of baptism you show us how you connect us with you and each other for the healing of the world. By water and Word you invite us into your community where we can serve our neighbour and be strengthened by your love. May your Spirit move within us like a stream of water flowing as a river leading us to peace, drawing us to faith, and showering us with your grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 43:1-7

A reading from Isaiah.

Near the end of Israel's exile in Babylon, God promises to bring the people home. They need no longer be afraid, because the one who formed, created, and called them by name now redeems them from all their enemies. God declares them precious and honored, and God loves them.

¹ But now thus says the LORD,

he who created you, O Jacob,

he who formed you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name; you are mine.

² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you,

and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,

and the flame shall not consume you.

³ For I am the LORD your God,

the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

I give Egypt as your ransom,

Cush and Seba in exchange for you.

⁴ Because you are precious in my sight

and honored and I love you,

I give people in return for you,

nations in exchange for your life.

⁵ Do not fear, for I am with you;

I will bring your offspring from the east,
and from the west I will gather you;
⁶ I will say to the north, "Give them up,"
and to the south, "Do not withhold;
bring my sons from far away
and my daughters from the end of the earth—
⁷ everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made."

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 29

¹ Ascribe to the LORD, you gods,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
² **Ascribe to the LORD the glory due God's name;
worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.**
³ The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders;
the LORD is upon the mighty waters.
⁴ **The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;
the voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.**
⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedar trees;
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon;
⁶ **the LORD makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.**
⁷ The voice of the LORD
bursts forth in lightning flashes.
⁸ **The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.**
⁹ The voice of the LORD makes the oak trees writhe and strips the forests bare.
And in the temple of the LORD all are crying, "Glory!"
¹⁰ **The LORD sits enthroned above the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king forevermore.**
¹¹ O LORD, give strength to your people;
give them, O LORD, the blessings of peace.

SECOND READING: Acts 8:14-17

A reading from Acts.

Peter and John are sent to support the new Christians in Samaria, a group that was recently baptized after hearing the good news of Christ through the preaching of Philip. Here the Samaritans receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in the laying on of hands.

¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. ¹⁵ The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit ¹⁶ (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). ¹⁷ Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 188)

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

The holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ John 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 strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His 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."

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²² and 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."

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Glorious God, may we hear your Word speak truth, your voice speak love, and your Spirit speak welcome, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

So it's been another one of those weeks. I know, I just got back from holidays so I should be totally rested and on the ball and everything, but honestly I had a lot of trouble staying focussed. Maybe it's because it was just barely a week of holidays after Christmas, and so it wasn't really enough for me to completely recover from all that hustle and bustle. Or maybe it's because winter has never been my favourite season and I always seem to be a lot more tired and less energetic when it's cold out and the days are so short. Or maybe I'm just in the thick of a mid-life crisis, which actually really wouldn't make much sense since I'm only in my early 30s, give or take a decade or so.

Whatever the case, I had the darnedest time writing this sermon. You'd think it should've been an easy too, with so much stuff going on in our part of the world. What, with our prime minister resigning, those wildfires in California, and this talk about Canada becoming the 51st state. So with so many things happening, with so much to talk about, with all this sermon fodder just waiting for a half competent preacher to run with, you'd think that writing a sermon this week should have been a piece of cake, right? But it just wasn't. I spent a lot of time this week thinking, writing, rethinking, rewriting, and staring at a computer screen. Even AI wasn't much help. So either the text is super hard to preach on, or it's me.

And if I'm honest, it's hard not to think that it's just me. I said earlier that any half competent preacher should be able to cobble something together with all this material we have, so what does that say about me that I couldn't? I know, I know, I'm hard on myself and I'm like among the top 10 pastors that have served here at Grace over our 72+ years of history (top 10 out of 9, that is), but I'm just describing what goes through my mind sometimes, especially when I have weeks like this one. I mean, I kind of thought I wasn't bad at this preacher thing. That's why I felt called to such a position and vocation. That is why I'm even here and not out driving for F1, or the World Rally Championships, or Uber or something. But every now and then something happens and it sort of shatters those notions that I have of myself. It

makes me question who I am and what I'm supposed to be doing. It makes me wonder if this even is God's call for me in my life.

Oh, there's that mid-life crisis thing again.

But you know what I mean, don't you? Those times when your confidence and esteem take a hit, those times when you can't help but second-guess yourself, those times when you perhaps regret your choices and wonder what on earth you were thinking? Or those times when we feel like we aren't living up to our potential, when we deserve the jeers and mockery from others for our failures, when we are looked down upon and dismissed because we just aren't it.

Again, I don't always feel that way and I especially don't get that vibe from anyone here, but I do think this might be something that many of us have gone through at some point. Perhaps our Prime Minister felt this throughout the years and leading to his resignation. Perhaps this is the American people in favour of absorbing this nation to become the 51st state might be projecting on us. And I wonder if this is how John the Baptizer felt in this somewhat unique telling of Jesus' baptism that we get today out of Luke.

Huh? Why would John feel this way? He did everything right, didn't he? He called out the sinners, welcomed the faithful, and pointed to the light that the darkness couldn't overcome, right? He was the one who baptized Jesus, for crying out loud. How can I say that he was questioning his call?

Well, like I said the story we get out of Luke is a bit unique. So much so that part of it is cut out of our lectionary reading. Perhaps because it is too different from our very established paradigms, thanks to the other accounts of this event out of Matthew and Mark. See, our Lectionary selection takes away verses 18-20 of this chapter, which tells us that King Herod had *put John in prison*. And we might think, yeah ok, we know that John called Herod out for the stuff he pulled with his brother's wife and was jailed, but so what?

Well, in Luke, it is right after we hear about John being imprisoned that Jesus goes and is baptized. Meaning, according to Luke chronology, Jesus wasn't baptized by John. John was too busy being in prison in this version of the story. Sure, we might say that the other versions tell us specifically it's John so we know that it was him, but I just find it interesting that Luke almost specifically says that wasn't the case.

It's like he's saying, come on, John, you had like one job. You were to point to Jesus who points to God, and anoint him through the holy gift of baptism for this work. That title of baptizer is literally in your name. But you had to go and get yourself in trouble and be made unavailable for this momentous occasion.

At least, that's how I read this through the lens of my own mid-life crisis full of self-questioning and doubt. And it seems like Luke supports it, because honestly he is silent on who does the actual baptizing of Jesus, which is probably intentional. See baptism in those days had somewhat of a different meaning. It wasn't so much as we see it now, as sort of the initiation rite into this way of faith. Rather, in those days baptism was more of an initiation into the "school" or tutelage of the one who was doing the baptizing. In other words, if Jesus were baptized by John, then according to the culture of the time, that would make Jesus John's disciple.

I don't think Luke wanted to portray that. So while still honouring John's ministry and contribution, he left out who actually baptizes Jesus. Luke left out John's part in Jesus' ultimate identity. So that raises the question for me, if John didn't baptize Jesus, then what was his role in the story?

And after reading it a few times, I've come to the conclusion that for John and for all of us, that role is to be a beloved child of God.

See, often we are judged by our actions or inaction, our skills and talents or lack thereof, our successes but mostly failures, by our peers and often by ourselves. It's like a natural wiring in us to determine the value and worth that we and others have. We often size each other up, list out the good and bad points, and interpret a whole person through that lens. We subconsciously or maybe sometimes very consciously make judgements based on what we see and what we assume to be true.

I think this is true for all of us. I know that I'm definitely guilty of judging myself and others in this way. And I know that I've been judged as well. But the good news is that in baptism, God shows us how this doesn't have to be the way. By the grace of God, we are formed and created in God's own image. By God's immense and abundant love for us and all people, before we are able to do anything that can be judged by ourselves or others, we are already declared as God's beloved.

This is what baptism is for. This is what it means, that God loves us. God loves us regardless of what we've done, who we've judged, or whatever party we vote for. God loves us when we have a hard time fulfilling our duties, our expectations of ourselves and from others, even in our sermon writing. God loves us, not because we are placed in a certain rank or garnered a certain accolade, but because God is holy and just and blesses us with a grace that surpasses understanding.

So who baptised Jesus according to Luke? The Holy Spirit. And then Jesus in turn welcomes all of us into this community under the Spirit, where the heavens are opened and we are declared as God's beloved, with whom God is well pleased, even before we could do anything to earn it or disprove it. We are God's beloved.

And as God's beloved, our only job is to *be loved*.

In this season after the Epiphany, may we continue to grow in the knowledge of who Jesus is and thus who we are as God's beloved in the Spirit. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: This Is the Spirit's Entry Now (#448)

CREED

Together with all welcomed into the waters of grace and love, let us confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's Creed:

**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.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Called into oneness with Christ and each other, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with “Lord, in your unifying mercy,” and you all may respond with **hear our prayer**. Lord, in your unifying mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you are full of glory and strength and we ascribe to you all that is due to your name. We give you thanks for the gift of baptism, where we can see just how much you love us and join us with you and each other in community. Ring this truth through and around our lives always, that our very being be testament to your grace. Lord, in your unifying mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, your voice calls us through the waters of baptism and thunders truth into our lives. May our service to you and neighbour be faithful and pleasing to you for the sake of the world that you love. We remember in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; those who use this building for worship, work, and play; our partners Anglican Church of Canada and Moravian Church in Canada; and our bishops, rostered ministers, congregations, and ministries of the ELCIC. In particular, we pray for our BC Synod’s Global Mission Companion, the Evangelical Lutheran Church – Peru, their president Ofelia Davila, as well as their other partner Synods: Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod and their bishop Mike Reinhardt; and LaCrosse Area Synod in Wisconsin and their bishop Felix Malpica. Lord, in your unifying mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, your voice called all of creation into being: the waters of the oceans, the trees of the wilderness, and hills and plains of all the lands. May we as inhabitants of this planet be faithful in our stewardship of all that you have entrusted to us, that we do not exploit what you have made for our own gain, but care for it for the good of all. Lord, in your unifying mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, your voice is powerful and shakes the strong and makes the mighty writhe in fear and humility. May we as nations of the world lean on your wisdom and strength as we try to work together toward peace in spite of difference. We especially pray for the continued support of those that we’ve sponsored to come into our country: Abraham Barhane; Solyana Amanuel; and Filimon Abraha; as well as for those who have not yet arrived: Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children. Lord, in your unifying mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, we all cry out the glory of your name, for your might and grace fill our lives with healing and hope. Be with all who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love might bring us all back into wholeness. Especially we pray for Bryan and Chona; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Debbie; Beulah; Bev and family; John and Betty; Sukhwant; Bishop Kathy; Pastor Kristen; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Will; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Hwee Yang; Ephraim; Georgina; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...
Lord, in your unifying mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you sit enthroned as king forever, eternally ruling in our hearts and communities as our God. Remind us always of our connection to you and each other through the gift of baptism, that our strength might be drawn from your truth and love. Lord, in your unifying mercy, **hear our prayer**.

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the inviting grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen**.

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

MEAL

DIALOGUE

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ, who was baptized and declared beloved by the Spirit, who also joins us with the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the whole church on earth, that we might together praise your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 190)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O Lord, holy is your name and all glory is ascribed to you. May your deeds of power and welcome always be remembered by this and all communities of faith, that we recognize and acknowledge your grace that is showered upon us with love and peace. And through the life and work of Jesus, you redeem us and save us and bring us together as your hands and feet in the world.

For on the night that he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, where he took the bread, gave thanks, broke and shared it saying, "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

Then after they ate, he took the cup, gave thanks, and passed it around the table for them to drink from saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

It is in this bread and cup that we see the gifts of grace that we are given that joins us together in your love, even as we declare this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

So it is to you, O God, that all glory and honour belong, as you strengthen us with your love, bless us with your peace, and reign over all the world as king forevermore, through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Joined together in love by the Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Taste and see God uniting us as a community.
Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 191)
I Come with Joy (#482)
Here Is Bread (#483)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

O God of glory and grace, we again give you thanks for feeding and nourishing us with this heavenly food infused with your love and truth that joins us together as your beloved children. May your promises continue to strengthen us in our faith, that we might joyfully live in community and service to you and all people, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May God's welcome remind you that we are one body,
God's Spirit reveal how we are blessed,
and God's voice declare that you are beloved, now and forever.
Amen.

SENDING SONG: Down Galilee's Slow Roadways (ACS #916)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, joined together as God's beloved people.
Thanks be to God.