

January 8, 2012
Baptism of Our Lord
Ellicott City Parish, Bethany UMC campus
David W. Simpson

Sermon: "Remember Your Baptism

Scriptures: Mark 1:4-12

Key Verse: "I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit"

If you know anything about sports, you know how important spirit is. I have been having fun over the past couple of weeks watching college bowl games and some of them have



pitted regional rivals against one another. I especially look forward to the Alabama-LSU game tomorrow night. Whenever archrivals play each other in high school and collegiate sports, then all the predictions, records and rankings go out the window. Often it is spirit and pride and determination that rule the game as much as talent.

In this season when team spirit is on display in bowl games and holiday tournaments I want us to consider an even more powerful spirit. It's the Spirit that God gives us to do Christ's work in the world...The Holy Spirit. Without it, a church is like a car without a motor. It might look good on the outside; you may even be able to sit comfortably in it, but it's not much use.

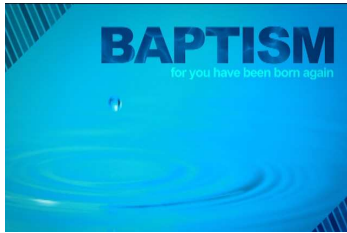
There is something mysterious, unknown and sometimes threatening about the Holy Spirit. Maybe it is because we have so little control over the Holy Spirit that from time to time there is controversy about the Spirit in the Church. There are some who believe that you are not truly a Christian unless you have the "gift" of the Holy Spirit, and that you do not have the "gift" of the Holy Spirit unless you utter ecstatic sounds in worship, a practice called speaking in tongues. Over the years we have experienced far too many divisions in the Church over differing understandings or perceptions of who had the gift and who didn't have it.

What is probably more common than churches that get overwhelmed by the Spirit are those that know hardly anything about the Holy Spirit. One of my favorite church jokes, (one that you may remember me telling before) is about a man visiting a church and was so moved by the sermon and music that he stood up in the middle of the service and began to testify and shout "Amen, Hallelujah!" One of the members sitting next to the man leaned over and told the visitor to sit down and be quiet. "We don't do that in this church," said the member. The visitor replied, "But, I have got the Spirit." To which the member responded, "Well, you didn't get it here. So be quiet."

I hope and pray that every once in a while you will be so overwhelmed by the Spirit of God that you want to shout amen, or sing Alleluia, or dance before the Lord. But, if that

is not your style, that's all right too because if you have claimed the name of Jesus and are living after the example of Christ, then you have the Holy Spirit.

For example, when someone is baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, God pours out the Holy Spirit on that person. In the Scripture lesson today we hear John the Baptist speaking of Jesus saying, "I baptize you with water but he will



baptize you with the Holy Spirit. After Jesus is baptized Mark records that the heavens were opened and the Spirit descended on him like a dove. In the sacrament of baptism you hear the pastor say, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" as we administer the water. Then, we lay hands upon the candidate and invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit by saying, "The Holy Spirit work within you, that being born of water and spirit you

may live as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ." Likewise in the sacrament of Holy Communion we pray to the Father saying, "Pour out your Holy Spirit, on us gathered here and upon these gifts of bread and wine...by your Spirit make us one with Christ and one with each other, in ministry to all the world..." As followers of Jesus we have been given the Spirit because Jesus promised on the night of his betrayal that he would ask the Father to send the Counselor, the Holy Spirit...to be with us forever.

Still, I suspect that many of us have never given much thought to the fact that the Holy Spirit dwells within us. We know we love Jesus. We trust in God and try to do his will. But we never really think that the Holy Spirit is in us. Yet Romans 8:9 says of those who belong to Christ, "You are in the Spirit since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."

So, if you belong to Christ, you have the Spirit. The way you know someone has the Spirit is by the way he or she relates to God and others. Galatians 5:22 says the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There are times when we feel the Spirit more strongly than others, and when we are more fruitful than other times, but the Bible assures us that when we belong to Christ, the Spirit is in us, whether we feel very emotional about it or not.

The Holy Spirit may or may not give us an emotional high. Some people have had moments when they felt God's power flowing through them in a special way that were obviously turning points. Sometimes they wonder why they don't have those mountaintop experiences more often. They wonder if there is something wrong with their faith because they don't feel that rush of the Spirit every Sunday when they come to church.

Sometimes those experiences of intense emotion, those spiritual highs, come after a long period of spiritual dryness. They are like finally getting air after being under water for a long time. After holding your breath for a few minutes, you experience breathing in a totally different way. You have an appreciation for air that you don't have when you are breathing normally. But you can't live like that all the time. Ordinarily, you breathe

constantly, in and out, in and out, because breathing is such a part of your life that you hardly notice it. That is what we want our spiritual lives to be like, constantly filled with the Holy Spirit and always growing in the capacity to do the Spirit's work. We are thankful for moments of intense spiritual emotion when they come, but they are not the standard by which we judge whether the Spirit is at work in us.

One of the results of the Holy Spirit working within us is that the Spirit unites us with the community of believers, the Church. Our baptism is a sign that we belong to God and are members of the family of Christ. That is why Peter and John went to Samaria to see what Phillip had done by preaching to the Samaritans. Samaritans were the ultimate outsiders. Israelites looked down on them more than they looked down on anyone else. The story of the Samaritan's baptism is a story of how far God reaches to bring outsiders in. No matter how far we stray from God, the Spirit is always pursuing us, reaching out to us, reminding us who we are.

When a friend wrote to Martin Luther, the great Reformer of the sixteenth century he told Luther he just couldn't make it anymore. He said all his troubles had gotten him so down he was totally defeated by life. Luther's advice to him was, "Remember your baptism." That is my advice to you as well. When you are at the end of your rope and don't know which way to turn, ***remember your baptism***. When you are tempted to do something that you know isn't right and saddens the heart of God, ***remember your baptism***. When everything is going your way and the future is bright and you are on top of the world, ***remember your baptism***. No matter what the Adversary may be whispering in your conscience, no matter what other well-meaning but misguided believers may say about your experience, not matter whether you are in the throes of spiritual ecstasy or in a dry and thirsty place; if you have said yes to Jesus, repented of your sin and yielded to his Lordship, then you have been redeemed by Jesus Christ. The Spirit that moved on the face of the waters at creation is in you. ***Remember your baptism!*** Thanks be to God. Amen.

