



The first Sunday after Epiphany gives us a “God’s-eye-view” of Jesus. We get a sense of the person and calling of Jesus from a divine perspective, and the message is clear, in Christ God partners with us, and invites us to partner with God. In addition, God gives us the power we need, through God’s Spirit, to fulfill our calling to be co-workers with God. The possibilities that this theme presents for worship are very exciting.

May our worship this week immerse us in the depths of God, and fill us with the power of God’s Holy Spirit.

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

Isaiah 43:1-17: God’s people have no reason to fear, for God has redeemed them, and they will not be harmed when passing through water or flame. God will bring the children of God’s people from the four corners of the earth, and will bring together blind people who can see and deaf people who can hear to bear witness to how God has saved and liberated God’s people.

Psalms 29: A song in praise of God and of God’s mighty voice which is strong and majestic, and which shakes the earth. Yet, God gives strength and peace to God’s people.

Acts 8:14-17: The apostles, having heard the news that the Samaritans had accepted God’s word, laid hands on the Samaritan believers and prayed for them to receive the Holy Spirit, which they did.

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22: The people wonder whether John the Baptist is the Christ, but he denies it and proclaims that another is coming who is more powerful than he is, and who will baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Then Jesus is baptised by John along with the other people, and the Spirit descends on him and he hears God’s voice affirming him.

[Click here to view the readings](#)

http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%20%2043:%201-7%0Acw%20Psalms%2029%0AActs%208:%2014-17%0ALuke%203:%2015-17,%2021-22

The First Sunday after the Epiphany YEAR C January 10, 2016

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

O Lord,
we beseech thee mercifully to receive
the prayers of thy people which call upon thee;
and grant that they may both perceive and know
what things they ought to do,
and also may have grace and power
faithfully to fulfil the same;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect Two

Eternal Father,
who at the baptism of Jesus
revealed him to be your Son,
anointing him with the Holy Spirit:
Grant to us, who are born of water and the Spirit,
that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Presider or deacon

As we celebrate the baptism of Christ, let us offer prayers to God who washes us in the blood of the Lamb.

Deacon or other leader

By the baptism of the Son of God in the river Jordan.

Lord, have mercy.

For *N* our bishop and the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

Lord, have mercy.

For *NN* our catechumen(s) and for their families and sponsors.

Lord, have mercy.

For all who seek Christ, and for the conversion of the whole human race.

Lord, have mercy.

For mercy, peace, and justice throughout the world.

Lord, have mercy.

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, the hungry and the oppressed, and those in prison.

Lord, have mercy.

For the dying and the dead.

Lord, have mercy.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Lord, have mercy.

The First Sunday after the Epiphany YEAR C January 10, 2016

Remembering the blessed Virgin Mary, *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

Holy One of Israel, who breathed across the waters of creation, accept the prayers we offer on this joyful feast, lead us by your Spirit through water and blood, and quench our thirst at the table of your Son; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

POST COMMUNION

Refreshed by these holy gifts, Lord God,
we seek your mercy:
that by listening faithfully to your only Son,
and being obedient to the prompting of the Spirit,
we may be your children in name and in truth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS

God of grace and glory,
you call us with your voice of flame
to be your people, faithful and courageous.
As your beloved Son
embraced his mission in the waters of baptism,
inspire us with the fire of your Spirit
to join in his transforming work.
We ask this in the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Sisters and brothers,
our baptismal vows call us to compassion and mercy
on behalf of those in need.
We offer our prayers for the church and the world.

Lord God,
you revealed your Son in the waters of the Jordan
and anointed him with the power of the Holy Spirit
to proclaim good news to all people.
Sanctify us by the same Spirit,
that we may proclaim the healing power of the gospel
by acts of love in your name. Amen.

God, your voice moves over the waters.
Immerse us in your grace,
mark us with your images,
and raise us to live our baptismal vows
empowered by the Holy Spirit
and the example of Christ our Lord,
in whose name we pray. Amen.

LECTIONARY NOTES 1

Isaiah 43:1-7:

- "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine." This is my mother's favorite Bible verse, and I can see why she likes it: we are called by name by God. Why were you named what you are named? What's the story behind it? I was named for Beth in *Little Women*, and after the middle names of two of my aunts. We are God's creations, and named by God, we belong to God. There is strength and comfort in that.
- Later on in these verses, I feel less comfortable with the imagery, though I understand the point the author is trying to communicate. There is such comfort in knowing that God is with us in all situations, that God created us, walks with us through the waters, protects us from fire, etc. But does it always have to be at the expense of those we name as our enemies? What about the people and nations that God gives in this text in return for our lives? Don't they get this same protection from God too?

Psalms 29:

- "The Voice of the Lord" - I guess I've never noticed this psalm before, which speaks primarily of God's voice.
- It is also visualizing God creating or in relation to a strong and powerful thunderstorm, which may be based on a psalm to the Canaanite god, Baal (see Chris Haslam's [comments](#) on this) God over the waters, God's glory thundering, breaking the cedars, flashes forth flames of fire, "the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness." What can we do with these images? I am currently leading a Bible-study, [Companions in Christ](#), in my church. This week's lesson is on using our imagination to read the scriptures. Certainly this psalmist used imagination to create this imagery, to make God's voice come alive.
- What imagery would you use to describe/envision God's voice in your life? I like the process theology metaphor of God's *lure*, God slowly luring me with God's voice until slowly, step by step, I followed.

Acts 8:14-17:

- A mini-Pentecost sort of text. Also a strong passage for Trinitarian creeds, calling not only on Christ's name for those accepting God's word, but also needing this Holy Spirit to be filled. Hence, in our UMC liturgies, we baptize "in water and spirit", in the name of all three persons of the Trinity.
- The word in Greek for 'spirit' is *pneuma*, meaning literally wind or breath, but metaphorically spirit or ghost. Also, usually when "holy spirit" occurs in the New Testament it is 'a' holy spirit not 'the' holy spirit as we usually say - there is no definite article attached.
- "They received the Holy Spirit" - the word 'received' from the Greek *elambanon*, can mean receive, but also, and I find more interestingly, come upon, overtake, seize, and possess.

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22:

- This week's reading picks up pieces from our gospel lesson in Advent 3. In that text, John the Baptist was preaching/teaching the crowds about how to repent in preparation for "the wrath to come." Here we pick up the verses that then

The First Sunday after the Epiphany YEAR C January 10, 2016

emphasized John's role as the forebear, the messenger preparing the way for Jesus.

- Again, some of these images of the threshing floor, the granary, etc., lose their meaning for us if we don't understand these processes ourselves. A winnowing fork, for example, was used to toss wheat into the air, where the wind would separate the wheat grain from the light chaff. See [this article](#) for more details.
- This is the event that marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and is significantly recorded in all four gospels. We might all wish for the heavens to part and for a dove to descend and for God to declare in front of all that we are pleasing and beloved in God's sight, but it doesn't usually work quite that way for us. How does it work for us? How can we know God loves us? What are the markers and milestones in our lives and ministries? How can we play John to someone, preparing them, providing a space for them to begin their calling?

By Beth Quick

LECTIONARY NOTES 2

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

The theme this week, as with every first Sunday after the Epiphany, is the baptism of Jesus. However, this year, the focus is less on Jesus, and more on how God's people are invited to participate in the baptism and to receive God's Spirit. In the Isaiah prophecy, God's people are promised liberation and salvation, even though they pass through water and fire, and they are called to witness to God's saving acts. In the Psalm God's voice is celebrated, which shakes the earth, but which also – by implication in the Psalm – strengthens and brings peace to God's people, even as God's voice affirmed Jesus. In the reading from Acts, the Samaritan believers, who have been baptised in the name of Christ, now receive their own "baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire" when the apostles lay hands on them. Finally, in the Gospel, Luke reminds his readers of John's prediction that Jesus is the one who will baptise them in the Holy Spirit, and, in this context, Jesus baptism is related, along with the voice of God that affirms and strengthens him. What this means is that our meditation on Jesus' baptism this week is not just an exercise in holy remembering. It is not just about Jesus. Rather, it is an acknowledgment that God is still at work in the world, and still invites us to participate in God's saving and liberating work. But, to do this, we, like Jesus, will need to be strengthened and empowered. We will need to be baptised in the Holy Spirit.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: This era in history finds the world facing huge, inter-related crises. Symptomatic or one-dimensional approaches have been shown and recognised to be ineffectual and the need for inter-disciplinary, systemic and collaborative approaches is clear. Increasingly, though, people of all disciplines are recognising that there is also a need for Divine partnership – an active drawing on God's creative, inspiring and empowering Spirit – to address the challenges we face. The celebration of the Baptism of Jesus is an ideal opportunity to open ourselves to the Spirit that Jesus offers, and to reaffirm our commitment to God's call to be participants in God's saving work. It is easy, in this world in which scientific method, measurability, and materialism are so highly valued, to fall into a functional atheism as we work for justice, liberation and healing of our world and its peoples. It's easy to believe that the only resources we have or need are financial, organisational, social, and very human. But, this week we are reminded that God is at work in the world, that we are not initiators of justice, and that all the good we seek to do is

The First Sunday after the Epiphany YEAR C January 10, 2016

simply a participation in the "trajectory of compassion" (to quote Bruce Sanguin) which God is constantly sustaining in the universe. So, in order to fulfill our role in this work of God, we need God's resources, the power of the Spirit, to guide, sustain and strengthen us, and we need God's voice, God's living word, to affirm and direct us.

LOCAL APPLICATION: In every community, in every life, there is a need for resources that are beyond our human capacity. Maintaining faithful marriages, keeping families strong, resisting the siren call of greed, addiction, immediate gratification, expediency and personal satisfaction, and making a contribution to the needy around us, all require more of us than we are capable of giving on our own. However, even as God calls us to live with integrity and wholeness, God enters our world and gives us God's Spirit to help us to do it. Jesus' act of being baptised is the assurance of his commitment to partner with us, and is the invitation for us to participate in the work of God's reign. Then the promise of God's Spirit to empower us, and the gift of God's living word to challenge, guide and strengthen us, assures that we have all the resources we need to participate in God's work. In addition, the message of the Scriptures, which reminds us that even the outcast Samaritans were able to receive God's Spirit, is a call to embrace all people and to invite all people to share in God's saving work, and to be empowered by God's Spirit.

SERMON OUTLINE 1

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 – filled with expectation...

John Bpt had burst on the scene – fulfilling his mission as the messenger – preparing the way for Jesus... People wondered who this strange personality might be...

1. The Expectation of the People 15: *the people were filled with expectation, & all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah – Christ – long expected – eagerly awaited... Could this new preacher be the Messiah? John moves to correct them...*

2. The Exhortation of the Baptist 16-17: *as he points them towards Jesus - one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals – the task of a menial slave... He warns them of the need to be ready for His coming – in justice – to sort out the good from the bad in the imagery of a farmer ... 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.'*

3. The Explanation of the Evangelist 21-22: *as Jesus was baptised by John in the Jordan River...*

a) the Vision – what they saw - *the heaven was opened, 22& the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove – symbolic of gentleness & peace – symbolic of His Mission...*

b) the Voice – what they heard - *a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'* – with its 2-fold implication for Jesus & the witnesses that day...

i) the Endorsement of Jesus as the Son of God...

ii) the Encouragement for Jesus as he embarked on His God-given Mission as Saviour of the world...

By Norman Porteous

The First Sunday after the Epiphany YEAR C January 10, 2016

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

["Sharing Frensdorff's Dream,"](#) the Rev. Suzanne E. Watson, *Sermons that Work*, Episcopal Digital Network
<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2012/12/31/1-epiphany-baptism-of-our-lord-c-2013/>

["Does Baptism Matter?"](#) The Rev. Dr. Michael Brown, *Day 1*
http://day1.org/4406-does_baptism_matter

["Spirit,"](#) Frederick Buechner.
<http://frederickbuechner.com/content/weekly-sermon-illustrations-spirit-0>

["God Believes in You,"](#) the Rev. Dr. Joanna Adams, *Day 1*
http://day1.org/1678-god_believes_in_you

["Baptism-Shaped Life,"](#) the Rev. Dr. Barbara K. Lundblad, *Day 1*
http://day1.org/1024-baptismshaped_life

CHILDREN

[Worshiping with Children](#), Baptism of Our Lord, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown ["Including Children in the Baptism of Other Children."](#)
<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2012/11/year-c-baptism-of-lord-january-13-2013.html>

[Story for Children's Worship and Family Activity](#), Baptism of Our Lord, at word-sunday.com: A Catholic Resource for the Lectionary by Larry Broding.
<http://www.word-sunday.com/index.html>

["The Baptism of Jesus,"](#) Dianne Deming, *Children's Sermons Today*
<http://childrenssermonstoday.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/the-baptism-of-jesus.html>

[Children's Sermon](#), *Faith Formation Journeys*
<http://faithformationjourneys.org/?p=569>

["Something So Common,"](#) On the Chancel Steps, children's resources by Frances Woodruff
<https://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2013/01/01/common/>

["Sermon of the Week,"](#) / ["Mensajes para ninos,"](#) Sermons 4 Kids, Charles Kirkpatrick, Object Lessons & Children's Sermons, Colouring Pages, Puzzles. Sermons4Kids.com.
<http://www.sermons4kids.com/>

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

[To God Be The Glory](#)
[A Charge To Keep I Have](#)
[Come Holy Ghost Our Hearts Inspire](#)
[Holy Spirit, Truth Divine](#)
[Deep Calls To Deep](#)
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The First Sunday after the Epiphany YEAR C January 10, 2016

[Your Word](#)

[May The Words Of My Mouth](#)

[More Love, More Power](#)

[Spirit Of The Living God](#)

[Breathe](#)

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