

Our Sunday Readings

ISAIAH 40:1-5,9-11
 PSALM 104:1b-4,24-25,27-30
 TITUS 2:11-14; 3:4-7
 LUKE 3:15-16,21-22
 (or other optional readings)

Generous Spirit

TITUS 2:11-14, 3:4-7

Reading closely

1. What is the *grace of God* that has appeared?
2. Why has God offered saving grace to *all*?
3. What references to baptism are in this passage?
4. What all could *godless ways* and *worldly desires* mean?
5. How are we supposed to live? What does this look like in practice?
6. How is our Christian *hope* different from everyday hopes?

Living the word

7. Are you *eager to do what is good*?
8. When did you treat someone with mercy despite thinking that the person didn't deserve to be?
9. When has someone treated you with generous, undeserved love?
10. What *godless ways* and *worldly desires* tempt you?

THE SECOND READING

By baptism

This passage reminds us that God offers grace and salvation through baptism. Therefore, those who have been baptized should turn away from sin and lead virtuous lives. God helps Christians to live in a new and holy way by filling them with his Holy Spirit.

Christians find the strength to persevere in their new way of life by remembering how they were saved. God didn't have to save them from evil and death, but chose to because of his *generous love*. Such undeserved love, a love that has given them eternal life, should make believers *eager to do what is good*.

...he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the holy Spirit...

LUKE 3:15-16, 21-22

Reading closely

1. If you had heard John the Baptist, what would you have thought and done?
2. Since you wouldn't have known about Jesus at the time, what might you have expected when John said that *one mightier than I is coming*?
3. Do you find the promise of a baptism *with the holy Spirit and fire* a good or frightening thing?
4. How do you think Jesus prayed? What might he have said?
5. How do you think Jesus reacted to what happened during his baptism?
6. Why do you think God manifested himself to Jesus in this way?

Living the word

7. What does baptism mean to you?
8. Do you consider your baptism important?
9. How has God communicated with you during your prayer?
10. What do you need to hear God say to you?

THE GOSPEL READING

Expectations

John the Baptist told people to change their lives in preparation for God's coming. As a result, some Jews thought John himself might be the messiah, the one God would send to bring about a dramatic change in their lives. John insists that he isn't.

- It was the job of slaves to remove their master's shoes. John explains that he's less than a slave compared to the person God will send.
- John urged people to repent of their sins. God's chosen one will do more – he will judge, empower, and purify people.

With the holy Spirit and fire

People were baptized by John only as a sign of their contrition and openness to God. John declared that when the messiah came, he would bring about a new era in which people are forgiven and God's **spirit** fills them. The **fire** may refer to how God would purify people, burning away their sins. It may also (or instead) refer to a time of judgment in which those who reject God are cast out of his reign (see v.17).

While Jesus was praying

The supernatural events that occur during Jesus' baptism point toward both his identity and his mission.

- The reference to the heavens opening was a common way of dramatizing God's presence
- The descent of God's spirit shows that Jesus has the wisdom and strength to do God's will
- The voice itself speaks words of love and affirmation and emphasizes Jesus' unique relationship with God

Although we think of these supernatural events as occurring when Jesus was baptized, Luke tells how they happened when *Jesus was praying*.

Luke emphasizes prayer more than the other Gospel-writers. He both includes more prayers in his Gospel and more frequently notes that Jesus is taking time to pray.

Saturated with the Spirit

Luke, the author of both this Gospel and the Book of Acts, emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit more than the other Gospel-writers. The prophet Joel spoke of a new era in which God's spirit would be poured out (Joel 3:1f.). For Luke, that era is now. First, though, the Spirit-filled Son of God must defeat sin and death. Then he can share this Spirit with all who wish to be baptized into it.

PRAYER

adapted from the Rite of Baptism

God,
the all-powerful Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
you have given us a new birth by water and
the Holy Spirit and forgiven all our sins.

May we who have been enlightened by Christ
always walk as children of the light
and keep the flame of faith alive in our hearts.

When the Lord comes in glory,
send us out to meet him
with all the saints in your heavenly kingdom
where you reign for ever and ever. Amen.