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Baptism of Jesus – Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
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I am growing older and I don't like it! I will have another birthday this year and it will remind me I am aging. Aging is not good for old folks. As you age, things change. Bones creak, the back aches, faces sag, mid-sections grow, and it is more difficult to put on a pair of pants standing up. There are not only changes in our physical bodies, but also changes in our personal world with the customs which once upon a time made us comfortable. We don't do things as we once did. For instance, fire. There was once the use of open fires to cook meals, heat our homes, and provide a night light. Abraham Lincoln read by the light from a fireplace. In the movie *Castaway* Tom Hanks was marooned on an island and struggled to start a fire.

As a youngster, my classmates stood around an open fire and we would cook hot dogs or roast marshmallows using a coat hanger for a spit. For years, I thought you only ate a hot dog when it was blackened. Parents did not have worry about kids trying to make out at a marshmallow roast. You couldn't kiss a girl for everyone had a small blister on their lips where hot melted marshmallow had stuck.

With change, and the use of heat pumps to heat our homes and electric stoves to cook our food and lack of open flames, we sometimes fail to understand the power of fire. The people of California have had small tastes that the power of fire has when raging forest fires destroyed homes and changed thousands of lives. Fire can come down mountain sides at 30 miles an hour and people have said the sound of a roaring wild fire was like the sound of a freight train.

Maybe our harnessing and the use of fire in our daily lives is why, sometimes, we cannot fully comprehend the power of fire as stated in the words of the Bible. As there have been changes in us, changes in our customs, these changes in the world just in our life time makes our lives and world so different from first century Christianity. Maybe that is why we sometimes don't feel the full impact of the words used by the writers of the Bible.

John the Baptist stands in the heat of the desert in Israel on the banks of the Jordan River in front of a large crowd who were waiting to be baptized. As water is streaming down from his hair and beard, he told the people, "I have baptized you with water, there is one coming who is going to baptize you with fire and the Holy Spirit."

We sometimes do not hear nor sense the full impact of John's words for our ears are not sensitive to the full meaning of the scripture. We tune out for we think they have no meaning in our lives. We have moved beyond that period of time. After all, we live in the 21st century. We are modern. We hear what we want to hear and fail to fully comprehend the word of God for our lives.

A man was concerned about his wife's hearing. She did not respond sometimes when he was talking to her. He decided to test her hearing. While sitting in his easy chair, he shouted to his wife who was in the kitchen, "What's for lunch?" No response. He moved to the door way and asked, "What's for lunch?" No response. He walked up behind her as she stood at the stove and asked, "What's for lunch?" She turned and said, "For the third time, "Soup!"

Well, God speaks for us to hear, "I bestow upon you baptism of water, fire, and the Holy Spirit." Look at the divine power given to us. It is God given power. It is given to us. That is a power which is greater than human power. It is a spirit that is greater than the human spirit. It can touch us and change us. It can fill us and God can use us. That power can lift us up and inspire us. It can give us strength, heal our spirits. It can comfort us. It can convict us of sin and wash us clean of all stains. The answer to the question, "What's for lunch?" is something greater than soup!

This is why John was telling the people there is something greater than what he can provide. It is the power and spirit of the living God. It is a power greater than what we can conceive, and more real than we can ever imagine.

Can you say **amen** to that? Can you say **amen** to something that is bigger than us, which takes us by surprise with its power and makes our hearts glad? Can you say **amen** to that which we long for but do not dare believe that it will happen? Can we say **amen** to that which comes to us when we have faith? Can we say **amen** to that which we receive but cannot control, earn, or buy?

You see, **it is the power of God** coming in the forms of water, fire, and the Holy Spirit.

It is power that is more than we expect or can ever believe. It fills the void in our lives. It comes in the water of baptism which washes us in the name of Jesus. It comes in the bestowing of the Holy Spirit and fire in our lives. The Holy Spirit is power. The fire purifies us which washes us and makes us white as snow. As the old hymn goes: "Whiter than snow, yes, whiter than snow. Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Maybe our cries to God should be, "Do it again lord. Do it again." Let us stand on the banks of the Jordan River and ask John "What shall we do?" And hear John speak to us: "I have the water, but there is one who is greater than me for he has power to baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit." Do it again Lord do it again. Baptize us anew. Pour out the fire and Holy Spirit on us again. This is why on the day of Pentecost when the disciples were in the upper room after the ascension of Jesus; Luke writes that the Holy Spirit came as tongues of fire.

There is something beyond any of us which reminds us that there is something called baptism: A baptism of water and the spirit and fire. It reminds us that we live in a world where there is a spiritual power, and this power can wash over us and through us. It can be as fire in the very bones of the deepest part of our being.

This is power that separates us from our normal awareness of life and breaks into our lives. God is real. God does amazing things. God touches the human spirit with the divine spirit. That human spirit is washed by the spirit and given new life.

God gives us water which is the very essence of life. God gives us the fire and His spirit. God then calls us to be his people. We are called to a life filled with fire and spirit for we have been baptized.

Some theologians say when Jesus came up out of the Jordan River, he was at that time filled with additional power for He then goes out into the wilderness to face the devil. When Jesus came out of the water he was no longer a carpenter's son from the small village called Nazareth. God had now prepared him to preach, teach, and heal. Jesus now had full power and was prepared to carry out the tasks for which he had been sent.

That is the power of Holy Scriptures. To remind us, who we are and what we have been called to be. We are a people called out by God to be the children of God. We are people whose ordinary lives have been touched in a divine way by a living God to be filled with power. We have been called through our baptism to be a holy people. Let us not forget who we are. Let us hear the word of the Lord. For the third time God speaks to us.

In the movie *The Lion King*, Simba, who is to become the king, looks into a pool of water and sees his reflection. Then he is told that it is not his reflection but it is the reflection of his father. Then the father speaks to Simba and tells him to remember. Remember who you are. Remember Simba. Remember. Jesus tells us to remember who we are. We are the children of the Holy God, washed in baptism, anointed with fire and the Holy Spirit. Remember who you are. My prayer is that when people look at us, they will see a reflection of our Holy Father and our divine Savior. Remember who you are. Remember what you are. You are God's people; Washed by water, purified by fire, and filled with the Holy Spirit.