

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS FOR JANUARY 12, 2025
BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

Isaiah 43:1-7

- These words were written for Judah and Israel, exiled in Babylon. They signify God's promise that God will bring them home and that they remain precious and chosen in God's eyes. For us, these promises signify the importance of the community of believers and how God longs for all to be gathered into that community. What does it mean for us that God gathers "everyone who is called by my name"?
- Though meant for an exiled nation, these words provide incredible comfort and strength as we hear them proclaimed to each of us, as we hear God claim us, as we hear of God's presence with us, as we hear of God's love for us. What words in this passage particularly capture your attention – especially in light of our baptism?

Psalms 29

- The psalmist appeals to images from nature – the waters, the cedar trees, the mountains, lightning, the wilderness, and the oak trees – in order to evoke the majesty of God. Where in nature do you experience the wonder and majesty of God?
- We use the psalm this Sunday to connect it to baptism. Consider what meaning these words have when we consider our baptism:

*The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over mighty waters.
The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.
May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace!*

Acts 8:14-17

- This passage is in the middle of a story about Simon, often called Simon Magus (or Simon the Magician). It proceeds in three parts:
 - Philip goes to Samaria to proclaim the Messiah to them. Because of Philip's words and miracles, many are baptized, including Simon, a magician who used to have people follow him.
 - (**Our passage**) When Peter and John go, they discover that though they were baptized, the Samaritans have not yet received the Holy Spirit. They lay hands on them, and the people receive the Holy Spirit.
 - Simon, amazed by the power of the Holy Spirit, offers money to Peter and John so he can have this power. Peter condemns Simon for this offer, and Simon prays for forgiveness.
- As Lutherans, we understand that we receive the Holy Spirit when we are baptized. Yet, this passage suggests that the reception of the Holy Spirit does not necessarily happen in baptism. How do we reconcile this passage with our Lutheran beliefs? Or do we?

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

- It is interesting to note what gets left out of this Sunday's lesson:
So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, added to them all by shutting up John in prison. (Luke 3:18-20)
In other words, in Luke's Gospel when Jesus was baptized, John the Baptist is already imprisoned! Who baptized Jesus? In Luke's Gospel, we do not know.
- What does it mean that Jesus was baptized? In Greek, the word simply meant to dip or plunge or drown. In Jewish circles, the word was used in a ritual sense, as, for example, in purifications before entering

the Temple. John the Baptist and others take that ritual sense and re-define it as a correction or replacement for those ritual purifications. These sorts of corrections or replacements often indicated the teacher one was following. If you were baptized by John the Baptist, you were following John the Baptist. Perhaps because of that connotation, Luke omitted any reference to Jesus being baptized by John. But we are left again with the question: what does it mean that Jesus was baptized? As an example for us? As an indication that something new was happening?

- What does your baptism mean to you?