

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

Father in heaven, as at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River You once proclaimed Him Your beloved Son and anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. Grant that all who are baptized in His name may be faithful in their calling to be your children and inheritors with Him of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE GOSPEL LESSON

Luke 3:15-22

(In the Baptism of Jesus the Spirit moved and the Father spoke. What was true for Jesus is true for each of us. Just as the Father spoke words of affirmation for His Son, so He speaks words of affirmation for each of us who are His sons and daughters.)

15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.

16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." 18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.

19 But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, 20 Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

21 When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

INTRO - On September 11, 2001, our country was attacked. Almost immediately our President initiated a response, a war against terror, which included the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. When he began this response, this war on terror, President Bush said this would be a different war than any fought before, that it would take time, and patience and become unpopular. So, will our country accomplish the tasks it set for itself in the war on terror? Just because a challenge is met, a task is begun, does not mean the task will be accomplished. You don't always accomplish everything you set out to do, do you?

I. Let me share with you the challenges that Jesus faced in our lesson.

A. Jesus was beginning the biggest job, the biggest task ever faced by anyone on this earth. He was beginning the ministry of teaching, of fulfilling prophecy, the ministry of healing and performing miracles, the task and ministry of living a righteous life for everyone else, suffering and dying for the sins of the world, and then rising from the dead to defeat sin and death.

1. Now, you may say that Jesus was God, that accomplishing this job was a foregone conclusion.

2. But, Jesus was not just God, He was also a man, the Son of Mary.

3. There are also prophecies about the suffering the Messiah would face, the torture, the agony.

4. Did Jesus the man have any doubts that he would finish the job he started?

B. Do you know the jobs God has for you as His children?

1. God calls us to **love Him** with all our hearts, and soul, and mind. . . even though our sinful nature leads us to selfish, rebellious living.

2. Jesus calls us to **love one another** the way he has loved us. Yet, when other people are sinful, and when we are sinful and selfish, there are times that it is difficult to love another, never mind loving in the self sacrificing way God calls us to love others.

3. Jesus calls us to **grow** in the knowledge and grace of God. But, growth is work.

4. Jesus calls us to **make disciples** of ALL NATIONS. That ultimately means using all our life, our possessions, our time, to serve Him, together with others. Jesus gave His whole life for us. But, how sure are you of working to make disciples of all nations?

II. I leave tomorrow for St. Louis, to work on my doctoral paper. Right now I'm just reading, consulting with my advisor, working on my project coming up here this summer at St. John. While I have begun this task, and continue working at it, doing the work on this paper while being pastor of St. John is not easy. I confess I wonder at times if I'll finish. So, one of the classes I took a couple of summers was a class on writing my paper. The intent of that class was to equip me with the knowledge and ability to write this paper.

A. Let me show you how **God equipped Jesus** for His world saving job.

1. When Jesus was baptized the heavens opened up. And the Holy Spirit descended bodily on Jesus.

A. The Bible tells us that God's Spirit strengthens God's people, helps us in faith, helps us in prayer, gives gifts and abilities, and guides us where God wants us to go.

B. In His baptism the Holy Spirit came in a way that all could see to bless and strengthen Jesus, to equip him for the difficult task ahead.

2. And, when Jesus was baptized, God the Father spoke for all to hear, and for Jesus to hear..

A. You ARE my son, the very son of God, even if you are also a human being.

B. I love you, and am pleased with you, I am WITH YOU throughout your ministry!

3. With the gift of His Spirit, and that assurance that Jesus was His son, loved by the Father, he was strengthened to begin His ministry and go do His work.

B. Today is a beginning in a number of ways at St. John.

1. Today is not just the first Sunday of a new year, but today is the beginning of membership for a number of people.

A. We are receiving 5 new members by confirmation, Francis Craig, Frank Garcy, Micah McDonald, Noel and Jean Woods.

B. We are receiving 2 new members by transfer, Mitch and Lori Gates.

C. So, as these families begin their life as members of St. John, they join us in the tasks God gives His church.

D. This is a big job.

2. Today we install new officers and board members, and re-commission those who have been serving.

A. We have made it through some real challenges in the last few years in expanding and renovating our building. Because of that we have financial challenges to face.

B. But, our congregational mission statement says, WE SHARE JESUS!

C. With less time to spend on getting a building done, it is time for a new beginning on our task of sharing Jesus! It is important that we refocus on our outreach, sharing Jesus love with others, and with one another.

D. Let me say that no human is able to accomplish God's work on their own wisdom, or strength, or faith.

E. But, let me also say, while, God expects each Christian, and God expects St. John, and God expects each member and our leaders to take this job seriously, and do the best work we are able to do.

C. So, will we accomplish these tasks? Where Jesus is God, we are fallible sinful people. But, let me tell you how God equips and helps, and strengthens you.

1. Your baptism is not just a nice custom of initiation into the Church.

A. Your baptism, adults and children, is the power of God working in your life.

B. In baptism God overcomes your sin, with His forgiveness. So, when you seem to have failed, you can keep working, because God keeps loving.

C. In baptism God gives YOU the Holy Spirit. No, you may not have the ability in yourself to do the job God gives. But He is with you in His Spirit, and the Spirit of God will give you the strength to do the work of God.

D. In baptism God CALLS YOU and names you His child. No matter how much you doubt yourself, remember God loves you, and He calls you. And God is not wrong.

2. Yes, the call of God seems impossible.

A. But God still calls.

B. And God saves sinners like you and me.

C. And, God gives you His Spirit and His love.

CONCLUSION - This past week we had the privilege of seeing God at work in our midst, whether you know it or not. Marilee Nufer's brother, Kurt Helgeson, was with us along with his wife and 4 children. I even took him fishing, and dropped my cell phone down the hole at Canoe Lake, but that is another story of ineptitude. Do you remember praying for Kurt? Maybe not. He became ill, and doctors did not know what was wrong. His kidneys shut down. There were times the family did not expect him to live. So we prayed. Do you see how God worked through you to accomplish what even the doctors struggled with?

When we begin a task it is wise that we doubt our ability to accomplish that task. But, today as we begin a new year as the Church of God, do not doubt His forgiveness, His Spirit, His love. We may not be able to do all God gives us to do. But if He calls us, He will equip us!