

Epiphany 1



The Baptism of our Lord

Prayer of the Day

Father in heaven, at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan you proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized into Christ faithful in their calling to be your children and inheritors with him of everlasting life; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Isaiah 43:1-7

{1} But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. {2} When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. {3} For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. {4} Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. {5} Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; {6} I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth-- {7} everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

1. *the Lord ...who created you...he who formed you*: "Yahweh is the creator and maker of Israel by his saving acts in the Exodus and by his covenant."

2. *when you pass through the waters*: An allusion to the passage through the sea during the Exodus.

when you walk through the fire you will not be burned: See Isaiah 42:25: "the LORD...poured upon him the heat of his anger and the fury of war; it set him on fire all around, but he did not understand; it burned him, but he did not take it to heart." Isaiah has used the same image to indicate Yahweh's great anger and his redemptive love.

5-6. *from the east, and from the west...the north...the south...far away...the end of the earth*: The people of Israel will return from "the end of the earth" (verse 6), from the exile and the diaspora.

7. *whom I created for my glory*: Israel's purpose for existing is to manifest the glory of Yahweh. This is the purpose for all of God's creative activity, and that is the reason for both God's anger at Israel's disobedience, and his great love which restores and redeems his people.

Comment: The structure of the passage is chiasmic or "arch-like."

"A Yahweh, Israel's creator and shaper (1a-c)

B I called you by name (1e)

C Fear not (1d)

D Nations given in exchange for you (3c-d)

Keystone Because you are precious and he loves you (4:a-b)

D' People given in exchange for your life (4c-d)

C' Fear not (5)
B' Everyone called by name (7a)
A' I created and shaped him (7b-c)"

Psalm 29

{1} Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. {2} Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name; worship the LORD in holy splendor. {3} The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over mighty waters. {4} The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. {5} The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon. {6} He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. {7} The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire. {8} The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. {9} The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all say, "Glory!" {10} The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever. {11} May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!

1. *heavenly beings*: In Hebrew, *bene elim*, "sons of God." In other near eastern religions these would have been subordinate gods who were literally descendants of the supreme god. In Israel, "sons of God" is a metaphor for those beings created by Yahweh who had the authority to act in his name. The Davidic king, likewise, had such a designation and such authority on earth (Psalm 2:7).

2. *the glory of his name*: Yahweh's name is his identity, and by glorifying his name, Yahweh, himself, is glorified.

3-5. *the voice of the Lord*: The voice is "thunder, the booming word of power." This image is used for Yahweh's voice in other theophanies as well (Exodus 19:19).

6-9: The image is of a raging thunder storm, with lightning and wind and thunder that shakes the earth. In such a storm one could see the power of the formless, dark, watery void that preceded creation, over which a strong wind blew.

temple: The Hebrew word, *hekhal*, means both temple and palace, as well as the Holy Place in the Jerusalem Temple. "Since a temple is often considered a god's dwelling place, the distinction between palace and temple is only minor. In the OT, the *hekhal* in the sense of 'temple' refers to the temple of Yahweh.... Several temples are referred to as the temple of Yahweh: the temple at Shiloh (1 S. 1:9; 3:3), the temple of Solomon (2 K. 18:16; 23:4; 24:13; Jer. 7:4; 24:1), and the temple of Zerubbabel (Ezr. 3:10; Hab. 2:18).

6. *skip*: The mountains of Lebanon shake with the power of Yahweh's voice. "Lebanon and Sirion 'skip,' they tremble at the roar and rumble of the voice of thunder.

Sirion: Deuteronomy 3:9: "the Sidonians call Hermon Sirion."

a young wild ox: The Hebrew is *r'emim*. It indicates a "wild ox," the extinct *aurochs*, which stood six and a half feet at the shoulder. Yahweh's voice has the power and the potential danger of a rambunctious six-foot wild ox

7-8: Lightning, thunder and wind are physical metaphors for Yahweh's voice.

10. *The Lord sits enthroned over the flood*: The "flood" is a metaphor for the waters of the pre-creation dis-order, the chaos which constantly threatens the creation. Yahweh is enthroned over it, and keeps it under control.

11: The final verse prays for Yahweh's gift of strength and peace, "the fullness of his power as the God of Heaven" to his people.

Comment: "...from the very beginning we will have to consider the probability that a Canaanite Baal hymn with its description of a theophany was handed down without radical revision on the part of the OT tradents in Israel...." "The recognition that this psalm is a

Yahwistic adaptation of an older Canaanite hymn to the storm-god Baal is due to H. L. Ginsberg, "A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter," in *Atti del XIX Congresso Internazionale degli Orientalisti* (Roman 1935), pp. 472-76. Ginsberg's observations of thirty years ago have been corroborated by the subsequent discovery of tablets at Ras Shamra and by progress in the interpretation of these texts. Virtually every word in the psalm can now be duplicated in older Canaanite texts." The Psalm is a poetic meditation on the "voice of Yahweh," its power and physical effects.

Acts 8:14-17

{14} Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. {15} The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit {16} (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). {17} Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

16. as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them: Acts is concerned with the Spirit's in-breathing of those who have been baptized in fulfillment of the Baptist's prophecy of one who "will baptize with the spirit and fire." The Spirit is associated with baptism (2:38), sometimes before (Acts 10:44) as in the case of Cornelius, sometimes after baptism (Acts 19:6) as in the case of the disciples from Ephesus. Only rarely does the Holy Spirit come apart from baptism (Acts 9:17) as in the case of Saul/Paul.

17. laid their hands on them...they received the Holy Spirit: The laying on of hands is a common means of transmitting the gift of the Holy Spirit from one person to another.

Comment: The choice of this passage for this Sunday is determined by reference to baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus, which is the necessary precondition for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

{15} As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, {16} John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. {17} His 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.".... {21} Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, {22} and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

16: He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire: Fire is used frequently in the Old Testament to indicate purification from sin (Isaiah 1:25; 4:4; Zechariah 13:9; Malachi 3:2-3; 1 Corinthians 3:13. John draws a distinction between his baptism with water as a sign of repentance and the baptism of the one who is coming, which will fill the baptized with the Holy Spirit.

[18-20 John's arrest by Herod is omitted. In Luke's view John is already passing from the scene. His purpose has been to announce the arrival of the "one who is coming," and with the baptism of Jesus he has fulfilled his purpose. John is still alive in Luke 7:20 and sends two of his disciples to inquire about who Jesus is.]

21-22. when Jesus also had been baptized...the Holy Spirit descended upon him: The presence of the Holy Spirit with Jesus is acknowledged as a feature of his baptism.

in bodily form like a dove: The descent of the Spirit has a physical component that was

expressed as a "form like a dove."

a voice came from heaven: In the inter-testamental period the immanence of Yahweh was expressed as the *bath qol*, the daughter of the voice, the small voice heard by the faithful.

You are my Son...: In this verse all three manifestations of God appear: Jesus, Holy Spirit, the Father. "Designating Jesus as 'Son of God' is an honor declaration of the highest sort.... ...if his true status is Son of God, his public statements and actions are fully legitimated.... Here many are present to witness the event."

Reflection

The Prayer of the Day tells us that at the Baptism of our Lord God the Father "proclaimed [Jesus] your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit." And we pray that God will make all who are baptized into Christ "faithful in their calling to be your children and inheritors with him of everlasting life." The responsibility of a child is to act in such a way as to bring honor to the Father, and as heir, to use the inheritance to further the Father's purposes.

Water and fire, are metaphors for God's blessing and empowering of his people, beginning with Jesus, and through him and his apostles to the whole church. That blessing is not for the sake of the one who is blessed, but to manifest the glory of God. When Israel sought to exalt herself because of Yahweh's blessing she was seen to be rebellious and disobedient, and was punished by humiliation and exile. She was restored because of the love of Yahweh for his purposes.

Hymns

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

777s --E--God Is Here! (719v)

85 --D--When Christ's

731v --I--Precious Lord (824s)

750 --II--O Holy Spirit,

647v --G--When Jesus Came

90, 373, 36, 191, 188, 79, 486

Prayers of the People

P or A: We lift our praises and concerns to God who, in spite of his majesty and power, has adopted us into his family and called us by name. Together we pray "Lord, in your mercy" and respond, "Hear our prayer."

A: That the church may respond to its call to be a sanctuary for the world, providing hope, guidance, and refuge for the lost. Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

A: That you, O God, might inspire the world's peoples to work for the protection of creation, abandoning wasteful lifestyles and acting instead as faithful stewards of the earth and all its creatures. Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

A: That those in need--the abused, the neglected, and the poor--may receive protection from us who have been called by name to be lights of hope in the darkness of the world. Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

A: That the sick and the dying may find peace in your comfort and protection. We pray especially for _____, and all those whom we name in our hearts. Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

A: That the children in our church school may be grounded for Christian living in learning the stories of your wondrous acts, and of our Saviour, Christ Jesus. Grant our children a sense of their own call into your family. Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

P: Send now your Holy Spirit into our hearts, that we may live lives worthy of you. We pray in the name of your Son, whom you called beloved, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Or

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.

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

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

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

For mercy, peace, and justice throughout the world.

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

For the dying and the dead.

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

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. Glory to you for ever.

Notes

[1] John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1968, p. 50.

[2] John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*. Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987, p. 129.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 348.

[4] M. Ottoson, “*hekhal*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (ed. by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren). Vol. III. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978, p. 383.

[5] In the King James version the word is translated “unicorn,” both here and in Psalm 92:10 based on the LXX translation. One liturgical writer suggested that, since the unicorn is an imaginary animal the image means imaginary threats in Psalm 92:10, but the translation in LXX is faulty and in any case probably meant a rhinoceros rather than the mythical unicorn.

[6] Kraus, *ibid.*, p. 351.

[7] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, p. 346.

[8] Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966, p. 175.

[9] Bruce Malina & Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 304.

[10] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclc0001.txt>

[11] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt

[12] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>