

Subject: Named, Claimed, and Made Christ's Own

Subtopic: The Transformative Power of the Holy Spirit

Video URL: https://youtu.be/mnT--x_au8

Today is the first Sunday after the Feast of the Epiphany. The word Epiphany means a “manifestation or showing-forth,” usually of something divine. Therefore, the Christian Feast of Epiphany and the Sundays that follow commemorate the manifestation of Christ, whose life is the world's light.

Therefore, today, on this first Sunday after the feast of the Epiphany, we celebrate the manifestation of Christ's divinity, which occurred at his baptism in the Jordan River when “*the heaven was opened,*” and “*a voice from heaven was heard.*” At that moment, God the Father conferred on Jesus the very special distinction of being his own beloved Son in whom He was well pleased. But today, we are not just looking at our Lord's baptism but our own. In our baptism, we were also given a name and claimed as Christ's own. This naming and claiming is in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy read today: “*Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine.*”¹

We are Christ's special possession. If you have ever had a special possession, you keep it, treasure it and protect it. I had a friend who collected baseball memorabilia. He has a room dedicated to his treasures, and he kept everything in it spotless. Similarly, our unique calling to be God's special possession carries with it responsibilities that must be lived out daily in our own place and in our own time. And we are given gifts in baptism that empower us to do just that.

For this reason, John the Baptist included in his proclamation, “*I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier*

¹ Isaiah 43:1

than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”²

I will never forget a priest who, while walking down the aisle, said, “Remember the waters of baptism!” Then he proceeded to splash everyone with water. It was an experience the people didn’t forget.

Therefore, there are many good reasons to remember baptism and all it represents, for it symbolizes more than just an outward washing. It signifies that we belong to Jesus. In the waters of baptism, “we are buried with Christ in his death. By it, we share in his resurrection. Through it, we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.”

In the musical *Les Misérables*, the author begins with a paroled convict named Jean Valjean, who steals the priest’s silver candelabra. When he’s caught, he expects to be returned to prison to work again in the mines. But the priest surprises everyone when he claims he’d given the silver items to Valjean. After the police leave, he turns to the thief and says, “You belong no longer to evil but to good.”

Similarly, in baptism, we “no longer belong to evil.” Paul says in his epistle to the Romans, “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God.” We have been forgiven, loved, and set free.

The Gift of the Holy Spirit, which is promised to us in our baptism, gives us the power to know God intimately and personally. Jesus said, ***“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper (also translated as advocate and comforter), to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.”³*** It is he who will ***“guide you into all truth.”⁴*** And ***“He (The Holy Spirit) will take***

² Luke 3:16

³ John 14:15-17

⁴ John 16:13

the things of Jesus and show them unto you.⁵ This is the Epiphany or showing forth that this season of the Church year celebrates, for it is through the presence of the Holy Spirit that ***“the eyes of our understanding are enlightened.”***⁶ It is through the Holy Spirit that we begin to understand ***“the hope to which he has called you”***⁷ as the light of Christ shines into your souls by the gift of his holy presence.

The prophet Joel foretold of these days when he uttered, ***“And in the last days, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.”***⁸ These verses from Joel promise provisions of spiritual light, which will be poured out upon God’s people with power and deep conviction.

What God did in Israel, He wants to do again. This sacred outpouring is not merely symbolized in a liturgical ritual involving the washing of water, but a divine encounter that empowers, renews and guides us in our spiritual journey, and it produces a personal transformation that renews in us a passionate clarity about his purpose.

I will never forget how this transformation affected me when I first encountered the gift of the Holy Spirit. When I came home from college with this newfound faith, my family didn’t understand. My mom said she was worried about me, and my brother Bill thought I was crazy. But they later said, “I think you really have something.” I really had changed, and there was something I had received that made them thirsty to know more.

⁵ John 16:14

⁶ Ephesians 1:18a

⁷ Ephesians 1:18b

⁸ Joel 2:28 (This verse was quoted by the Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:17)

In our Old Testament lesson today, Isaiah tells us, “***When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.***”⁹ This promise meant that God would be with them at every twist and turn of their journey, no matter how discouraging your voyage through life turns out to be.

Jesus clarified that we are not left in the world as orphans. He has promised to come to us.¹⁰ And with his love poured into our hearts, we can be there for each other, serving as his hands and feet.

The Holy Spirit is our Helper, Comforter, Encourager, and Counselor—a constant companion in a world where loneliness and afflictions abound. But Peter tells us in the Book of Acts that “***after the baptism that John preached, God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, who then went about doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil because God was with him.***”¹¹ God is with us, too, and he has promised us the gift of the Holy Spirit so that we may be empowered to serve the world in his name. He has called us, named us, and claimed us as his own so that we can confidently know He is always with us, even until the end of this age. Amen.

⁹ Isaiah 43:2-3

¹⁰ John 14:18

¹¹ Acts 10:38