**JESUS THE SON WHOM GOD LOVES**

Luke 3:15-38 (K.V.: 3:22)

“…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.’”

Thank God for Luke’s gospel 2021! This new beginning of a gospel bodes well for us and we feel as if we are already in early Spring (Ch. 3 sounds like March to us). In the previous passage, Dr. Jason well illustrated that superficial repentance is not repentance at all but it requires our sincere regrets and some concrete actions so as to bear good fruit (such as a crook mechanic stopping ripping off a naïve customer like me). In doing so, we can make our heart ready for Jesus to come. In today’s passage, we see John’s introducing Jesus as the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire. Then comes Jesus’ receiving baptism, which was like an inauguration ceremony. It was such a wonderful event that both the Holy Spirit and God gave congratulatory messages. We also see God’s marvelous design and faithfulness in Jesus’ genealogy, which also shows his being the Savior of all the people. May God baptize us with fire and confirm our call with his confirming word so as for us to be full of confidence and strength to fulfill His will upon us.

1. **Jesus, the One Who Baptizes with the Holy Spirit and Fire (3:15-22)**

Look at verses 15-16. As we learned last week, the popularity of John the Baptist soared when his message of repentance was well received. He had charisma, austerity and courage to challenge any people, anytime. So, everyone acknowledged his being a man of God and took his water baptism. Then, people began to wonder if John might possibly be their long-awaited Messiah. Some even revisited the extraordinary story of his birth 30 years ago and shared it in Social Media.

Historically, when there was a strong leadership, Israel flourished. They enjoyed peace and prosperity under King David and King Solomon. Now that their national glory was hurt with the Roman Rule, they missed a King-David-like leader, and somehow, found him in John. They hoped that with his charismatic leadership and unmatched courage, John might lead a revolution to establish the new Israel and restore their glory from the hands of the Romans. However, John was very clear about his identity. He said he could only baptize them with water. Then, he compared himself with Jesus to make them more focused on Jesus than him.

To John, it was a no-brainer for them to focus on Jesus because Jesus was more powerful than he and that John considered himself not even worthy to untie Jesus’ sandals. At that time, untying a master’s sandals belonged to the lowest servant’s job. So, John perceiving himself as lower than the lowest servant is quite surprising. We can see why he said so in another angle. Verse 16b reads. “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

The original meaning of baptism, possibly coming from the Greek term, “bápt,” is, “to bathe.” So, baptism means “bathing,” or “cleansing.” John’s water baptism, though essential, symbolizes surface cleansing. It can cleanse only outwardly. However, Jesus’ baptism symbolizes core or fundamental cleansing. It is like water cleanses dirt and soil from a gold nugget, but fire melts it, burns all the dross from it, and turns it into pure gold. That is why Malachi the Prophet called the Lord’s fire as a refiner’s fire (Mal 3:2b). Job said a similar thing when he said that after the test (possibly the test of fire), he would come forth as gold. The fire of the Holy Spirit truly puts us in a crucible, burns all our sins, and changes us like pure gold, acceptable to the Holy God. No fire, no salvation. No wonder why John considered himself as a unworthy servant when he thought about his water baptism and Jesus’ fire baptism.

I know one Korean pastor who had a unique experience with Jesus’ fire. Once (in the early 70s), this pastor served a very poor and rough neighborhood (like South side Chicago) to literally and fervently follow Jesus’ teaching (jus as St. Francis did). In doing so, he helped the needy, stood up against injustices and sometimes criticized the wrongdoings of the local government. Because of that, he was imprisoned in the coldest winter time ever. When he was in an icy-cold cell with no heat, he was so cold that he tried to read and find the word, “fire,” in the Bible to forget about coldness. He enjoyed finding “fire” and liked the part of the consuming fire of God and the fire of Elijah. However, when he reached the point where he found Jesus’ baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire came, suddenly he began to feel warmth. No longer was he cold, but was full of the Holy Spirit and fire for a whole day. He adopted that day as his second birthday and began to commemorate it every year to be purer and more fervent. He is Pastor Jin Kim who authored one of the best-selling Christian biography, “Awaken the Dawn.” We cannot experience fire like Pastor Jin did, but we can at least pray for the Holy Spirit’s fire may melt our heart so we can be purer like pure gold in 2021 amid the crucible-like situation.

Look at verses 17-18. Here, we see John exhorting the people and proclaiming good news to them. But the very first thing John said about the good news was God’s winnowing fork and unquenchable fire. A winnowing fork was used to separate the wheat from chaff on the threshing floor. This illustration meant God’s impending judgment. How come then this message of judgment could be the good news? It is because avoiding the judgment of God is one of the core parts of the good news. Surely, through Jesus’ forgiveness of sins, we can avoid God’s judgment. Here, we also notice that John was a man of truth, who would not shy away from speaking the truth and the difficult topics to anyone, anywhere. Then, he got into trouble. When he rebuked Herod for his unlawful marriage to Herodias, his brother’s wife, Herod locked him up in prison. It was the darkest time ever. The evildoers became bad to worse when their sins were exposed through the light that the righteous people shared and consequently they were persecuted. What can we expect? Fortunately, the dawn of the new era was about to break over that region.

1. **Jesus, the Son of God (3:21-38)**

Look at verse 21a. “When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.” This sounds like a very short and casual sentence, but hidden is a significant spiritual meaning. First, even though Jesus was baptized like all other people, he actually did not need baptism in the first place because he was sinless. In that sense, his baptism was very different from that of the people. He received it not for cleansing but for representing all human beings. In that way, he could become like us in every way and empathize with all our weaknesses (Heb 4:15). Second, he received baptism to take over John’s ministry. It means he acknowledged God’s work in John thus far and was more than willing to continue what God established in John’s ministry rather than starting it over. Jesus was humble enough to be the second figure. Third, Jesus’ baptism meant to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15). Surely, baptism also symbolizes one’s death. That said, Jesus’ baptism points to his own death as a ransom for many (Mt 20:28) and it would appease God’s fierce anger toward sinners. His perfect obedience to the point of death would fulfill all the requirement of the law and thus obtain perfect righteousness for all.

What happened when Jesus was praying and John baptized him? Look at verses 21b-22. Heaven was opened, the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove and God’s voice was heard from heaven. Three supernatural things! Ever since Adam and Eve were banished, heaven was shut tight and the relationship with God remained fractured. Yet there are a handful of occasions in the Bible when heaven was opened such as when Jacob had a dream in which he saw a stairway reaching to heaven and when Stephen saw heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. In the case of Jesus, this heaven-opening was more dramatic because here we can see Jesus, the Holy Spirit and God the Father all at the same place and at the same time with special audio and visual effect. It was the heavenly Zoom meeting! God was the host, and the so-called inauguration ceremony was live-streamed! Note what the voice of God said about Jesus. That is the core of our key verse. “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

Why was Jesus beloved, and well-pleasing God? We can see the best answer in John 6:38, which reads, “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.” In his own remark, Jesus said he came down from heaven when God sent him. His purpose of coming was not to do his will but to do God’s will. By doing God’s will, he would complete God’s redemptive work and that would well-please God the Father. God will love him with his inseparable (Ro 8:28) and undeniable love. No matter what God loves Jesus even at the cross. Surely, what God said to Jesus would strengthen him at the most difficult time. When we are convinced that God loves us and what we do well-pleases Him, we can overcome anything and become more than conquerors. We need that kind of confirmation in our mission life. Note what the Holy Spirit said in a visual message. It was like a dove emoji that represents peace. Surely, doves were the first domesticated bird and always bring hope and good news to us.

The rest of the chapter are dedicated to the genealogy of Jesus. Luke’s version of the genealogy is similar to and yet different from the one in Matthew 1. What are notable differences? As you can see in verse 23, Luke had a different view on Jesus’ earthly father, Joseph. He added a line, “so it was thought,” to emphasize that Joseph was not the direct biological father to Jesus. Here, the name of the father of Joseph was Heli, while in Matthew, Joseph’s father is Jacob. After that, we have a whole lot of different names until we reach David. In Luke’s genealogy, we see that Nathan was the son of David, while in Matthew’s genealogy, we see Solomon as David’s son. Both Nathan and Solomon were born between David and Bathsheba (1 Ch 3:5). Considering this, we can see that both Mary and Joseph are descended from David. So even if we trace Jesus biologically or legally, Jesus is still in the line of David. How marvelous it is that God orchestrated the lineage so that in any case, Jesus the Son of David would fulfill the promise given to David! God’s faithfulness is beyond understanding! Note also that Luke traces Jesus’ linage back to Adam and to God while Matthew goes back to Abraham. In our Friday meeting, Msn. Anastasia pointed out that while Matthew’s gospel was to evangelize the Jews, so he emphasized Jesus’ being in the line of Abraham and the royal blood of David, Luke, him being a gentile, wanted to show that Jesus was not only for the Jews but also for all the people of the world. That makes sense! Jesus is the Son of God. We are all sons of God and daughters of God regardless of our human background and Jesus is the same Savior to all of us!

In conclusion, we learned Jesus is the only one who baptizes us with the Holy Spirit and fire. Jesus’ fire baptism can make us pure and save us from sins. Jesus received baptism to represent all mankind and to fulfill all righteousness. The Holy Spirit and God the Father confirmed Jesus’ new initiative with a dove and a message of confirmation. God loves and is well-pleased with Jesus who would do His will. Jesus’ genealogy proves God’s marvelous design and faithfulness to fulfill his Messianic promises. May God strength us with his confirming word so that we may do His will as well.