

**FOCUS: The Good News is that we are made children of God in our baptism.**

In the name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

This morning, we hear a message of new beginnings—of new starts in ministry. In the words of Isaiah, we hear the prophet telling the people of Israel that their time in exile is about to end, and they should get ready to begin a new phase of life back in the Promised Land. Peter and John go to Samaria to join with the new Christian community there, to lay hands on them, and bring the Holy Spirit to them as the Samaritans get set to start their witness to the Gospel. And Luke tells of the baptism of Jesus, which marks the start of his public ministry and also marks the beginning of the journey that appears to end on the cross in the junkyard known as Golgotha.

John's preaching had to get under the skin of those who heard it, just as it gets under our skin today. John's listeners were, for the most part, fellow Jews—the Chosen People of God. Yet, here was one of their own calling on them to repent. Shocking? Perhaps to us, and maybe to some of John's listeners. However, Israel had a long history of prophets of the Most High coming to the people and telling them to change their ways, because what they were doing was not pleasing to the Lord.

Isaiah was one of those Old Testament prophets who carried the Lord's message to change. Unfortunately for Israel, the people didn't take Isaiah seriously and, as we learn in the first part of Isaiah, the nation is overrun and the people are taken into exile. They spend years in captivity in Babylon, until the time comes when the Lord is ready to restore them to their Promised Land. Second Isaiah—and we know that this prophet wasn't the same Isaiah from the first part of the book—came to the people with the Lord's message of the redemption of the people. Things are about to change, and it's time for the people to get set for a change.

Isaiah, speaking to the Israelites in exile during their captivity in Babylon during the 6 century before Christ, tells them that things are about to change. After years in exile, the Lord is about to bring them out of exile and restore them to their rightful place. The Israelites will return to their home—the

Promised Land. “Do not fear,” the Lord says to the people through Isaiah, “for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” God confirms for the Chosen People the promise God made to their forbearers. The Israelites were called by God to be God’s people, and no matter how bad things might look, God is still with them, and the people are still God’s chosen. The Chosen People, says the prophet, will walk through fire and not be consumed. The waters will not consume them, just as the waters of the Red Sea did not consume Moses and the others during the Exodus from Egypt centuries before. The Creator and Covenant-maker is reassuring the created that they have not been forgotten. The people are God’s chosen ones, and not only are they about to be led from captivity, they are—as they have been and will be—redeemed by God. God will pay whatever cost to redeem his Chosen People. Isaiah, speaking the words of the Lord, rattles off nation after nation which will fall at the hand of the Lord so that the Chosen People will be restored and ransomed from their captivity. God promised the Israelite people that God would care for them, and God is keeping that promise. “I have called you by name, you are mine,” the Lord proclaims. Not the Babylonian king’s, not the Egyptian pharaoh’s, but the Lord’s. This was the message the Israelites were longing to hear. It was a welcomed message of good news.

Indeed, it is also Good News for you and I. For you and I have heard God call our name as well, and make us children of God and coheirs with Christ. Not in the parted waters of the Red Sea, or the murky waters of the Jordan, but in water nonetheless. We stood, or were held by loving parents and sponsors, beside the font. We were called by name and God poured water over us, cleansing us of all our sins, drowning the Old Adam and the Old Eve in us, and making us God’s own. Oh yes, it looks like water. It feels like water. It even tastes just like water. But the water of our baptism is more than just water. As Luther reminds us in the Catechism, baptism is a sacrament instituted by Christ, and is our entry point, our starting mark, into the body of Christ. We are baptized not in the name of a human being or human institution, but in the Name of the Triune God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our baptism is not a human act, but an act of God. Oh, to be sure, it’s done by a human being, but the human simply serves as the conduit for baptism. The work is truly the work of God.

Rather than a baptism of repentance, such as John the Baptist proclaimed, we have a baptism of forgiveness. In our baptism, when we take the ordinary of water and add to it the extraordinary of the Word, we become-the children of God. Water alone can wash the dirt from our hands and body, but it cannot cleanse us of our sins. We are not consumed by the water, but the old creature in .us is, and we rise up from the water anew as chosen ones of God. Nothing we human beings can do will do that. However, God can, and does, cleanse us of all our sins in our baptism. God's grace is bestowed on us in our baptism, and we are called by name and made God's own.

After Jesus was baptized, while he was praying, we are told that the heavens opened up, and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove. With the dove comes a mighty voice. It is the same mighty voice we heard in Psalm 29, but unlike the Psalm, where the voice of the Lord "shakes the wilderness" and "strips the forests bare," the voice of the Lord proclaimed Jesus as the beloved Son of God. From his baptism at the River Jordan, Jesus begins his public ministry—a ministry which will lead him from Jordan to Jerusalem, and in Jerusalem, to the Cross. It is Christ's death and resurrection into which we are baptized, forever freed from the bondage of sin and death. And as baptized children of God, we are called to minister to all people—to make disciples of all nations.

In our baptism, the Holy Spirit comes to us, and fills each of us. The unquenchable flames of the Spirit touch us. We are not consumed like chaff, but sealed by the Holy Spirit and made holy children of the Almighty One, called by name, not by Social Security or driver's license number. We are marked with the cross of Christ and made forever children of God.

God promised the Israelites that, as the Chosen People, God would do whatever God had to do to care for them and restore them. That covenant extends to us, too. When human beings could do nothing to pay the price for God's forgiveness, God sent the Son to be that sacrifice. God did the only thing possible—he gave the Son to come as an innocent infant to grow up and live and teach among the people. God gave the Son to hang on the Cross and die for all people, and in the glory of the Easter morning, rise again. In our baptism, we are reborn in Christ. Even the words of our baptismal

liturgy remind us that God calls each of us by name, and we are made God's children. God's grace, freely given and fully underserved, comes to us in our baptism. We hear the comforting assurance of God's grace and forgiveness declared to us as we begin worship each Sunday morning. We receive a visible sign of that grace each and every time we gather around this. Table to share in the Body and Blood of Christ. For you, my dear sisters and brothers in Christ, the Body and Blood of Christ are given for you for the forgiveness of sin

We are baptized once for the remission of all our sins, yet we should, as Luther says "regard our baptism as the daily garment we are to wear all the time. Every day we should be found in faith and with its fruits, suppressing the old creature and growing up in the new."<sup>1</sup> When you pray, make the sign of the Cross to remind you of your baptism. As you enter and leave this sanctuary, touch the water of the font and make the sign of the cross to remind you of your baptism. Go forth. from this place and live as child of God, witnessing God's love for you and all people by your actions. Let 'your light .so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."<sup>2</sup> This we are called to do in our baptism. "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord!" we are told each Sunday. This we are called to do in our baptism.. We are part of the Lord's family, and we are each called to the "family business" — to be coworkers in Christ. In a word; we are called to minister. So, let us go and minister! Amen.

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<sup>1</sup>LC 466:84-86

<sup>2</sup> Book of Worship Holy Baptism, 124