

Written Copy: Luke 3:16-17 “A Baptism of the Spirit and Fire?”

Baptism of Our Lord
Sunday, January 9th, 2022

Text: Luke 3:16-17

¹⁶ John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap 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 the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

The text's intent

The intent of this passage is to lift up Jesus' baptism as the reason that my baptism is the Sacramental saving flood that I confess it to be. Jesus has come to take my place and live the life of perfect obedience for me. He undergoes my baptism in order that I receive what He received, the Holy Spirit descending upon me and the Father's declaration that I am His beloved son of whom He is well pleased. United with Jesus by faith His baptism becomes mine, and the declaration of the Father over Him becomes the declaration of who I am. My sin is washed onto Jesus who, in my place, receives the baptism of fire that is the wrath of God poured out upon Him for my sin. This wrath brings about His suffering and death, and through that my sin is buried with Him, no longer to be charged to me. Just as Jesus rose up from the water, as He rose again from the grave never to die again, I rise with Him to a new life lived no longer under the condemnation of sin that leads to eternal hell but declared to be washed clean and bound for eternal life. I am made to be and constantly kept the wheat that Christ will gather into His storehouse of eternal life on the Last Day. But all who disregard the gifts given in baptism will be nothing more than the useless outer husks from the wheat harvest, gathered and destroyed in the eternal fire that is never extinguished.

Focus Statement:

God the Son took on our humanity to take our place in life, death, and in resurrection, and to unite us to Him by faith. He stood in our place in the baptismal waters so that in our baptism we receive the blessings of the Holy Spirit and of the Father claiming us as His beloved child of whom He is well pleased. The Spirit poured out onto us in our Baptism creates the faith and the unity we need with Christ. This unity means that our sins flow onto Jesus, who then takes our place in the baptism of fire that was His suffering and death. His death means the death and destruction of our sin. His resurrection means we rise to a new life of obedience now, and rise on the Last Day to eternal life, as wheat gathered into His barn.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We may wonder what John meant when he described Jesus' baptism being with the Holy Spirit and with fire. We may wonder how His work of winnowing and clearing the threshing floor fits with our conception of the Sacrament of Baptism that results in our salvation

What the hearer should do as a result:

Make use of the ongoing removal of sin that the Spirit accomplishes as we repent: confessing our sins and hold fast by faith to Christ's words of Absolution. See the temptations and trials of this life not as God's judgment of our sin, but His means to purify us as they move us to repentance.

Subject Sentence: Saved by water so the fire purifies instead of destroys

Introduction: The Positive and Negative Roles of Fire

Luke 3:16 John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

We know who this One who is coming is, who is mightier than John the Baptist. It's the One who John was raised up to prepare the way for and point to. It's Jesus. ***He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.*** As I was reading through our Gospel Lesson that phrase caught my attention and stuck with me. As a Lutheran I confess and believe that my baptism, with water included the gift of the Holy Spirit and all that comes with Him: the power of faith to trust in my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. But what about this idea of fire? Neither my baptism, nor any I've officiated as a Pastor since included fire as a part of it. What is John referring to here?

Pentecostal belief in 2nd Holy Spirit baptism with fire: special filling of Spirit:

Luke 3:16, taken out of context, along with the following verses from the Acts Chapter 3 accounting of the Day of Pentecost are used by Pentecostal Churches to support a different Baptism than our water baptism; one they call a Baptism of the Holy Spirit. **Acts 2:3-4** ³ **And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.** ⁴ **And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.** In their minds water baptism is an important step in the life of a Christian, and outward sign of an inward change that has already happened, but for them it's not the means the Holy Spirit uses to bring about that change, which is what we believe, which is why we call it a Sacrament. In their minds they think the believer needs this other baptism, the same kind of thing that happened on the Day of Pentecost. They see this as the complete filling of the Holy Spirit which the Christian needs to live out their lives of faith. They believe that the outward sign of this filling is the manifestation of "speaking in tongues", which amounts to a babbling that they call "the tongue of angels". It usually requires another person to interpret.

Of course, to buy into this belief you have to ignore the fact that those in the Upper Room, after being filled with the Holy Spirit, began not to babble, for that would not have served the purpose for the Pentecost event which transpired. They each began to speak a real language, one that they had not known how to speak until that moment. A language that could be understood by some of the pilgrims that had travelled from various parts of the Roman Empire to celebrate the Jewish Holiday Shavuot: or "The Feast of Weeks": marking the Wheat Harvest.

You also have to ignore **Ephesians 4:4-6** ⁴ **There is one body and one Spirit---just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call---⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.** Notice the repeated emphasis on “one”: one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Jesus mentions only one baptism in His final marching orders to the Church in **Matthew 28:18-20** ¹⁸ **And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."** Jesus, the One given all authority on heaven and on earth commands us only one baptism in the name of the triune God. This is the same baptism that He Himself received in our Gospel Lesson. So let's take a closer look at exactly what happened in Jesus' baptism, and why that is important to us.

The Baptism Jesus: Of the Holy Spirit and of Fire

Luke 3:22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

We understand why John the Baptist mentions the Holy Spirit as he describes Him descending upon Jesus. Great for Jesus, but what does that mean for us? Since Jesus is God the Son who became incarnate to become one of us, fully human and fully divine, we confess that He walked this earth to live the life that we never could. He took our place living the life of full obedience that is required of you and me. He is the one and only person that didn't need baptism Himself since He had no sin. But here He is standing in for you, receiving the baptism that you and I need as sinners. He did this not so that we would never have to, but to show us how much we need to follow His lead. We need the Holy Spirit to descend upon us as He did upon Jesus. We need the Father's declaration by His mighty voice, the voice that spoke Creation into existence, the voice that thunders over the waters as Isaiah describes it. We need His voice to declare that you and I are His beloved children, that with you He is well pleased. What happened at Jesus' baptism is the unseen spiritual reality that happened in your baptism. And the faith that is the gift of the Spirit in your baptism unites you to Jesus so that you receive all the blessings that He received.

Luke 3:17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Jesus didn't need the cleansing power of baptism but you and I desperately need to be cleansed of our sin. If we are not, then what John the Baptist describes in this verse is what our ultimate fate will be. Here he is no longer describing the work that Jesus had come to do in this His first Advent. Instead he was giving the same kind of prophetic witness that many of the Old Testament prophets gave: an overall summation of Jesus work that includes His first and second coming. It is the same kind of view you would have as you looked out over a mountain range. You see the peaks, but not the valleys in between. Even

though you can't see these valleys you know that they are there. John sees the both the salvation that Jesus has come to provide in His first advent through baptism, and the judgment that He will usher in when He returns again.

This time of judgment is portrayed by John the Baptist with the illustration of threshing wheat as it was done in his day. When one picked the wheat kernels there would also be the straw, the stem that the kernels were attached to, as well as the outer husk which surrounded the kernel, neither of which were edible. Threshing was the process that separated these undesired inedible parts from the wheat kernels that were edible, and with which one could make bread. The heavier wheat kernel was shaken loose from the lighter straw and husk using the winnowing fork. The wheat kernels would be gathered up for food. The straw and husks, known as the chaff, were burned up. The meaning of this illustration is made clear in Jesus' description of His Last Day return. **Matthew 24:30-31** ³⁰ **Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.** The angels will gather you, the wheat, into His barn of eternal life. But those who have refused His gift of salvation are the chaff who will spend their eternity in the Lake of Eternal Fire.

Luke 12:49-50 ⁴⁹ **"I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!**

Baptism saves you and I from the fate of eternal suffering in hell because Jesus suffered the fire of God's wrath in our place. This is what He is referring to when He connects the casting of fire upon the earth with an upcoming "baptism" He must endure. This baptism by fire is His suffering and death. It's Him taking from us the fate we deserve on the Last Day, the fires of eternal torment that our sin earned for us. That suffering was poured out on Jesus because your sins were washed away from you and onto Him as you were joined with Him in His baptism. When He comes again all who refuse the gift that baptism brings will suffer these flames. It's a fate no person need suffer, because Jesus suffered it for each and every person who ever lived. He suffered it for you.

Romans 6:3-5 ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

The waters of your baptism quench the fires of torment meant for you. All of your sin that would stoke those fires was washed to Jesus where they were separated forever. Those sins went with Him to the grave and were buried, never to see the light of day again. Instead, in your baptism, which intimately united you with Christ, through His resurrection victory gives to you the gift of a new heart and new life. You now live and walk in that newness of life, forgiven and restored to what you were originally created to be, His precious and beloved child.

Our Water Baptism of the Holy Spirit and Fire

While your baptism saves you from that unquenchable fire, the fires that are trials, suffering, and temptations we encounter as Christians living in this world continues to find a place in our life. Their purpose is not to destroy, but to purify. The connection of fire and it's purifying power can be seen in the Old Testament in Isaiah's call to be God's prophet.

Isaiah 6:5-7 ⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" ⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

Isaiah in the presence of the LORD God Almighty confesses who he is by his thought's words and deeds. But our gracious God responds not with a consuming fire, but with a burning coal that takes away Isaiah's guilt and sin, making him worthy to be the mouthpiece to speak God's word to His people. That fire from the altar cleansed him of his sin.

Malachi 3:2-3 ² But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.

Malachi speaks prophetically of the coming and the ministry of Jesus as being like a refiner's fire. Gold and silver needed to be refined to remove all the impurities that were naturally found within them that would ruin the value of these precious metals. The fire would turn the metal into liquid and the impurities could then be removed. He also compares Jesus' ministry with the work of a fuller (or launderer) whose soap washed away the dirt and filth to leave a clean and white garment. This refining by fire and washing away of sin like that of a fuller's soap are the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in your baptism throughout your life on earth.

Acts 2:2-4 ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

No wonder the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost has the visual manifestation of fire. This is God repeating the atoning work done for Isaiah, but now on a much grander scale. The Spirit appears as a flame of fire that divides and rests on above the heads of each person in the room manifested in the shape of a tongue. Here the Spirit is symbolizing His purifying work that will result in these broken sinful people, saved by grace, and empowered by the Spirit, to share the Gospel as His Church.

The Holy Spirit is at work in you today as you hear the testimony of the Apostles and celebrate the Sacrament of the Altar. But He is at work outside of your time here in your everyday life. He uses the fiery suffering, trials, and temptations that come upon you from this sinful fallen world, your own sinful hearts, and the author of sin, the devil himself. In the lives of the unbaptized and unbelieving these things can have the result of creating despair. In the lives of those who forget their baptism and the faith given and allowed their hearts to become hardened can fall away, and find their end is that unquenchable fire. But not in the lives of those whose baptismal faith is alive and working by the hands of the Holy Spirit. Peter describes the effect of the fires of suffering and temptation in **1 Peter 1:3-7** ³ **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith---more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire---may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

The Holy Spirit uses the fiery trials in our life to strengthen our faith in two ways. They force us to turn from ourselves and lean on Him to guide us, direct us, and restore us. And when we fall into temptation, He restores us through Confession and Absolution. He uses those fiery trials to keep alive in us a repentant heart, the kind of heart that a beloved son of the Heavenly Father has. This is the ongoing baptismal work of the Holy Spirit in your life and mine.

Conclusion:

We believe and confess our Lord and Savior gave us one baptism, the Sacrament of Baptism. Whenever that may have happened in your life, the unseen spiritual reality of what transpired is what we see in Jesus' baptism: heaven opened, the Spirit descending, and by the gift of faith that delivers all that Christ won for you on the cross and in His resurrection the Father declares you to be His beloved child. It is done in the name of the Triune God, whose family you are baptized into. It happens only once in your lifetime, but its effects continue on for the remainder of it. You daily die to sin and rise to a new life in Christ just as Paul describes in our Epistle lesson. And how does the fire come into it? The Holy Spirit uses the fiery trials that fill our lives to keep us in faith and strengthen our faith, burning away the doubt and sin and leaving you stronger. All to ensure that on the Last Day you will not be gathered with the unbelieving chaff to be thrown into the Eternal Lake of Fire. But instead you and I will be welcomed into Jesus' storehouse of Eternal Life. May that faith be kept alive in your hearts and minds until Christ calls you home. Amen