

Jan 13, '19, Anthon UMC, Luke 3:15-17, 21-22,"Remember Your Baptism"
By Pastor Sheryl K Ashley

“And the people were filled with expectation.” I’m happy to say we have traveled along with those of Jesus’ time celebrating this season of expectations. Remember we have traveled with them through the birth of the long awaited Savior of the World! We have experienced the epiphany of the star and the visit of the non-Jewish Wise men signifying that even the Gentiles are included in this expectation. We have seen Jesus purposely staying behind at the temple at the tender age of 12 to be about His Father’s business, And now here we are remembering about 30 years later, Jesus all grown up about to experience His baptism...That went fast for me, didn’t it for you? ...But maybe not for Jesus who has been waiting around, knowing from early on that God had something important for him to do. No doubt Mary has shared with him what the angel said to her. That may be why he remained behind at the temple conversing with the learned leaders, and now at 30 he’s still waiting expectantly for the go ahead sign to do more. I wonder if he has been impatient to get started while he’s been humbly working in his earthly dad’s carpenter shop, making tables and chairs and fashioning wood into all sorts creative things, waiting, praying, listening, learning, praying, waiting for the call to action, waiting for God’s

signal that the time had come for him to move forward in their eternal plan to redeem the whole fallen human race.

Have you ever thought in your life that God had a plan for you, a calling you waited years to happen, but it just never came to pass? I thought ever since my confirmation years that God would use me somehow in ministry in my life, until I was in my late 40s and then I just got frustrated figuring that I was hearing wrong. I was getting older and I couldn't see that it was ever going to happen. Then Pastor Joe-d DowlingSoka, who I worked for here as secretary, took me on a religious retreat. In talking to other pastors I learned that after a certain age, there was a way to go into ministry by doing it through Course of Study School, working on assignments at home and attending seminary in the summers. And when I made that effort, the doors flew open and away I went to fulfill my calling, gaining my first part-time appointment right here in Anthon UMC. God had taken his sweet time but I was thrilled. So, don't ever think that you are too old to fulfill something to which God has called you and you have not yet done. God doesn't seem to care about age. God seems to take special joy in making certain people wait until they think they're too old to do his bidding, just to prove in His power they can. For proof, look at all the older 2nd career pastors serving churches in this area. Keep knocking in prayer on that door

to open and do not hesitate to take that first step forward in faith when it does. Remembering, God's timing is not usually our timing.

When the time was right, John and Jesus locked arms and both took a step forward that swung open the doors to their calling. John, older than Jesus by 6 months knew one day that the time was right to come out of the desert and call the people to repent and be baptized. John was such a powerful preacher and so like Elijah the great prophet of Jewish history, the people were attracted to him, coming in droves down into the water of the Jordan to get baptized. Water baptism was not new to the people of John's time. It was used as a sign of a purification and as new beginning for Jewish converts. This time they came out to the Jordan, religious leaders along with them all, but John was not impressed with their coming, calling them in some earlier verses about this event, "a brood of vipers", asking, "who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" They came to water baptism but he knew they would not live their lives like it made a difference. For some baptism is for show.

Today too often people get baptized or have their children baptized as something they think they should do or they do it because other people do it and it's expected. But if they don't truly repent and live out their water baptism it is just a rite of passage or an empty promise and no more. The

baptism Jesus would bring would involve much more than a watery promise, but rather an inner power to live out those promises for God.

The people who came were impressed with John because of his manner and appearance, rugged like Elijah so they thought John was the One they were waiting for. They thought he was the Messiah come to bring them freedom from political oppression. Now that would be something to be baptized for...so they came in mass. Those must have been tiring days for John out in that cold water, but he never lost his energy to serve God, making a way for his cousin Jesus to come into his own.

John, who became known as John the Baptist was always right on target. He knew who he was and he knew why he had come and he was not to be dissuaded from doing it by being mistaken for the real Messiah, Jesus the Christ. John proclaimed who he was by strongly but humbly saying how he was not worthy to untie Jesus dirty dusty sandal. Even Jews who were servants were excused from this nasty task, but John claimed he was not worthy to even do that for the Messiah. John clearly stated who Jesus was and that Jesus would come to separate the good from the bad, and the people better get cleansed of the bad by repenting and being baptized to be ready for Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire.

You may have noticed our reading today skipped a few verses that tell us how John was permanently removed from being in this equation because he spoke the truth too bravely threatening too many. These verses read: “So, with many other exhortations, he, John, proclaimed the good news to the people. But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the other evil things that Herod had done, added to them all by shutting up John in prison. (In later verses we read that Herod had John beheaded...that stopped John’s words...but it wasn’t John who would be God’s main talker about judgement. It was Jesus who would mainly talk about God’s love and grace and forgiveness including all people, which would be far more dangerous words in the end.

And so, Jesus comes on the scene to be one of the baptized...to join in the waters of the Jordan River. The sinless one entered the water along with us sinners as a symbol of a new beginning of his ministry for God...as God in the flesh...to be tempted and tested as one of us...to laugh and cry with us...and in the end to die for us.

Jesus who had been waiting all this time, came in obedience to be baptized by John. He did not consider himself to be above joining us. It was

essential for him, fully God and fully man, to be one of us to accomplish the calling that he was born to do, that he was yearning to do.

After his baptism, as Jesus was praying, it was then God responded to his Son as if heaven could no longer hold our Father's blessing back from Him. God's mark upon Jesus was visible and audible. It came from the Holy Spirit in the form like a dove descending and it came from the Father as the sound of rumble from heaven saying, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." The Trinity revealed together in a oneness at that Baptism. While at our own baptism we may not personally be able to see or hear these physical signs, they are given to us in the measure we are called to use them. Whether you hear it audibly or not, in being baptized God is naming you his beloved son or daughter. "What name is given this child?" is asked and answered and in the anointing of the oil you are sealed unto the Holy Spirit and by prayer we are inviting the Trinity to come be part of this holy event.

Because this is one of the two sacraments Jesus commanded up to do, we believe one outward sign of our baptism is that it makes a difference in how we live our lives. Part of that difference is that we are joined because by God's Spirit into one body and we are joined to one another. We are a

member of God's family and how we invite others into baptism changes everything for them and us, especially for how the children see God in us.

United Methodist Bishop and well known writer, Will Willimon tells a wonderful story about a baptism he once conducted. It was at a small rural church. A determined twelve-year-old boy wanted to be baptized by immersion. The boy's pastor conveyed the request to Willimon. Methodists rarely baptize by immersion, but Willimon was willing if that was the lad's request.

Willimon arrived at the church that Sunday morning, and sure enough, there was the pastor standing on the front steps of the little church with a small boy, "Jeremy, this is the bishop," the pastor said, "It's an honor for you to be baptized by the bishop."

Young Jeremy looked Bishop Willimon over and said only, "They tell me you don't do many of these. I'd feel better if we had a run through beforehand."

"That was just what I was going to suggest," Willimon said. They went into the church's fellowship hall where the pastor showed them their newly purchased font.

Jeremy said, "After you say the words, then you take my hand and lead me up these steps, and do you want me to take off my socks?"

“Er, uh, You can leave them on if you want, “ Willimon said. He obviously wasn’t an expert at these kinds of baptism. But they had a wonderful service. The bishop preached on baptism, the choir sang a baptismal anthem, then the whole congregation recessed into the fellowship hall and gathered around the baptismal font. Willimon went through the baptismal ritual. Then he asked Jeremy if he had anything to say to the congregation before his baptism.

“Yes, I do, “ Jeremy said. Then addressing the congregation of that small church, Jeremy said, “I just want to say to all of you that I’m here today because of you. When my parents got divorced, I thought my world was over. But you stood by me. You told me the stories about Jesus. And I just want to say to you today thanks for what you did for me. I intend to make you proud as I’m going to try to live my life the way Jesus wants.”

Willimon who is a very humorous man, said, by this time he was weeping profusely. Jeremy asked him, as Willimon led him up the steps into the pool, “Are you going to be OK?”

“I baptized Jeremy,” concludes Willimon, “and the church sang a great Hallelujah!”

And sing they should. Baptism is God’s public mark upon us that we are his. We, as UMs give this gift to our children at an early age in the holy

Sacrament of Baptism. We can come at all ages for baptism but we traditionally bring our children to the water as young infants, for the washing away of sin...not that they and all of us won't sin all our lives and need to repent, but for the original sin that we are all born with since the fall of Adam, we are brought to the water, along with the word, and the seal of the Holy Spirit is placed upon the baptized. We the congregation are blessed each time there is a baptism as we join with them to give our promise that we will help to guide the baptized into a new life in Jesus Christ once and for all. We are held responsible for these promises.

Let me ask you, How many of you remember your baptism?

How many of you remember being told about your baptism?

How many of you have told your children or grandchildren about their baptism so they can remember? Once a baptism is done, it's done.

United Methodists don't rebaptize as we believe that once God seals you unto himself, you are marked his forever. God does not take your baptism away when you sin. God just waits for you to remember and come back to reclaim it. So we UMs are invited to remember and renew our baptism vows every year in some form on the Sunday we remember Jesus' baptism. You will be invited this morning to take part in this sacrament just as you take part in the sacrament of Holy Communion, that when

temptation and testing comes upon you, you can remember and resist and call on the power of the Holy Spirit that lives in you from the baptism of Jesus Christ. It is a gift to be able to renew and reaffirm and recommit ourselves remembering Baptism is not about what we do. It's about what God does. Let us turn to page 50 to restate our vows that we might affirm their power in us once again.