

WITNESS ABOUT JESUS...
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

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¹⁵ *The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.* ¹⁶ *John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs 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 he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." ...* ²¹ *When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened* 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."*

Dear friends in Christ,

We have reached another change in the Church Year Calendar. This past Wednesday was Epiphany, the Gentile Christmas. It is the celebration of the Magi coming to see Jesus. I see Epiphany as a very special time for you and me for two reasons. First of all, we rejoice because the inclusion of Gentiles reminds us that Jesus came for you and me. The second is that this is a time when we also celebrating witnessing.

As Christians we are always concerned with our witness. We do certain things and avoid other things not just because they are right or wrong, but because everything we do and say witnesses who we are. It is easy for us to point to the baby in the manger at Christmas, but Epiphany is not as easy. So what do we say?

1

(15-17) The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

It was so easy for people to be attracted to someone like John the Baptist. He may have looked a little wild, but people were drawn to him. He spoke so faithfully and so forcefully! They were not used to preachers speaking the way John spoke. It was so different, they wondered if he might be the Messiah. Had he claimed to be so, no one would have been surprised! But John pointed people away from his appearance, away from himself, away from his ministry. He witnessed in an unlikely way and pointed to someone else – to Jesus. He did so by pointing them to who Jesus was and what Jesus was going to do. Jesus would do so great that John wasn't worthy to tie his shoes. He baptized with water, Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. He pointed out people's sins; Jesus would judge them. John witnessed about Jesus.

In today's world it would be easy to get caught up in all this. There are seminars today that churches promote that tell "church leaders" how to dress, speak, and act. There are yet others that put an emphasis on the type of worship space, the friendliness of people – just about anything a marketer can study and recommend. There is certainly value in those things and churches who will advertise those things in an attempt to reach people.

Do we do that? Do we point to the beauty of our church, the comfort level of our pews, the convenience of our parents room? Or do we do what John did? Let's point to Jesus.

Let's witness about Jesus being greater than any man, woman, or child – even the ones related to us. Let's witness about Jesus as the judge who will condemn every filthy thought, inappropriate word, and action we commit, the one who will send us to a very real hell for any one of those things. Let's witness about Jesus who will send the Holy Spirit into our hearts through Word and Sacrament so that you and I can be saved from all of those sins.

2

(21-22) When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove.

When the Holy Spirit came down from heaven in the form of a dove he was anointing Jesus. From that time on Christ began his office as the Messiah, as the Christ.

For thousands of years, God kept promising that the anointed one would come, then he finally sent him to anoint the most unlikely person, Jesus. The Holy Spirit showed the world that Jesus was the one.

From this time Jesus began his ministry, called his disciples, preached, and did miracles. About three years from this anointing, Jesus endured his suffering before the leaders of the temple and Pontius Pilate before finally dying on the cross. He did this for us. He did this so that we could be saved. God wanted us to know that he was the one who was the Messiah and the Christ. The Holy Spirit witnessed about Jesus.

You and I witness Jesus when we, also, point to Jesus as the Son of God, and how Jesus faithfully and steadfastly did all those things that you and I fail at. Do you make decisions that are always in God's best interests? Jesus did. Do you show respect for your life and the life of others? Jesus did. Does your faith clearly show in all of your words? Jesus did. He did that for you and me because he loved us that much. Even when we didn't know him, Jesus knew us and planned and accomplished our salvation. Every time you and I talk about him this way, we witness Jesus just like the Holy Spirit did.

3

And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

What picture do you get in your mind about the Son of God? Maybe that's an unfair question for a bunch of Christians. But honestly, would you see him as a humble son of a carpenter who is baptized in the Jordan River by an itinerant preacher? Could there be anyone who seemed more unlikely?

But that is who Jesus is. And not only that, God witnesses that he loves this son and is pleased with him. A perfect God can only be pleased with a perfect Son. Even the slightest imperfection is unacceptable to him. But the Father clearly witnesses that he was pleased with Jesus.

When there seems to be no solutions to problems, sometimes people take matters into their own hands. Sadly, that usually ends up making a tragic situation even more tragic. We see it all the time in our news sources. So how can we help such situations, whether they be someone else's or our own?

Witness about Jesus! Witness the one who is loved by the Father, because it means you too are loved. Witness the one with whom the Father is pleased, because it means that he is also pleased with you. Trust in the one who has done everything well for our sake. Then go and live that faith. As you do you too, will WITNESS ABOUT JESUS.