
Mondovi: Our Savior's & Gilmanton United Methodist Churches
1.12. 2025, 1st Sunday after the Epiphany/Baptism of the Lord, Rev. Hyuntae Kim, Ph.D.

Living Daily in Baptism

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22.

Let us pray: Father God, today through this message, help us to encounter Jesus Christ anew, who brings true life into our baptism and is present within it. Let us hear Your powerful voice like the sound of mighty waters, cleansing us through this Word, and burn away the chaff in our hearts with the fire of Your Spirit. In the name of Jesus Christ, the river of life. Amen.

A few weeks ago, we meditated on the baptism and message of John the Baptist. Today, continuing from his message, we aim to meet Christ more abundantly. Luke 3 teaches us the true meaning of baptism and guides us into it. The baptism of repentance preached by John does not mean a one-time ceremony but being immersed in Christ throughout our lives. It's like living a married life after having a wedding ceremony.

According to Martin Luther, when Christ called us to repentance, He was not referring to a ceremony but was inviting us into a lifelong immersion. An invitation to repentance. In his book "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," Martin Luther talks about how today we have turned baptism into a ceremony and do not apply faith to it continually." This is ultimately a matter of faith, and being immersed and washed daily in the Jordan means continually applying the Word with faith.

If the Word stands strong within us, it will inevitably happen to us. When it says that the Word came to John, the original text implies "it came to pass." It signifies that the promise will be fulfilled—"This will come to pass." Therefore, living immersed in Christ means these things happen as promised. You should receive it as a promise that these things will come to pass when you live immersed in Christ.

In verse 15, the people were so eagerly anticipating the Messiah that they thought John might be the Christ. However, the true Christ is far greater. We, too, need to encounter a Christ who is beyond our expectations. What must be washed away at the Jordan is our ignorance of Christ. This cleansing happens when we immerse ourselves in the river of the Word, which is Christ.

John the Baptist preaches about who the true Christ is and what happens when we immerse ourselves in the Jordan, which is Christ, the river of the Word. John refers to Christ as "one who is more powerful than I" and "one who will come." When we

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immerse ourselves in the Jordan, first and foremost, we receive Christ, who is mightier than we are. Even if we have been living our lives by our own strength, the One who is more powerful than us comes and works with all our troubles and life situations through the baptism.

We must invite Christ into the challenges facing Korea, America, and the world. One meaningful way to fully acknowledge and invite Christ is through fasting and prayer, which is why I fasted and prayed for three days last week, consuming no food and drinking only water.

Secondly, within the immersion in the Jordan River, Christ baptizes us with the Spirit and fire. The Spirit of Christ is also fire, and fire is also Spirit. This fire appears in two ways: as a consuming fire and as a fire of love. On one hand, Christ must consume us; and on the other hand, He must bake us with the fire of love.

When we are immersed in His Word, Christ brings us into the Spirit of God, into His very essence, to bestow it within us. During this process, He burns away the chaff that surrounds our hearts—worries, despair, doubt, and unbelief—with fire. Once only the grains remain, He then bakes them with the fire of love to make delicious bread. If the chaff remains, it cannot be eaten. We need fire to make us useful for the work of God's Kingdom.

Christ comes to set up His threshing floor and winnows to separate the wheat from the chaff. Our hearts are His threshing floor. Through winnowing, He removes the chaff and gathers the wheat into His barn, burning the chaff. This is indeed something to be thankful for. Within us is the life of Jesus, the grain. However, we are still surrounded by chaff—unbelief that misunderstands and resents God, unkind hearts that don't understand His blessings and grace, and hearts lacking in love and compassion. These chaffs cannot be removed by our own strength, so when we immerse ourselves in John's water baptism, Christ, the mighty one, comes to remove and burn them away. This immersion is not a one-time event but a continual process.

John said, "I am not worthy to untie His sandals." In Jewish culture, people wore sandals tied with straps. Untying the straps meant preparing to wash someone's feet as a servant, but more deeply, it signified that a bride was declaring "You are my

bridegroom" by untying and removing the man's sandals. Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church.

The first instance of untying a sandal strap in the Bible appears in Ruth 3. This story also takes place on a threshing floor. Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth had both become widows and returned to the land of Judah, living hand-to-mouth. One day, Naomi instructed Ruth to go to Boaz's field, as Boaz was a close relative who could act as their kinsman-redeemer, protecting and continuing their family line. Boaz was sleeping on the threshing floor that night. During the day, oxen had ground the grain against a stone, separating the kernels from the chaff. Both the piles of kernels and chaff were heaped together, waiting for workers to winnow them by the evening breeze. This was a time of great celebration. Boaz had covered the threshed heap with a tent and was sleeping beneath it.

Naomi told Ruth to go to the threshing floor and uncover Boaz's feet, then lie down, and he would tell her what to do. Ruth did as instructed. In Jewish culture, sandals symbolized rights, and the one who received the sandals shared in those rights. Boaz accepted Ruth's request and proceeded with the official steps to marry her.

Boaz foreshadows Christ. The Christ, who is like Boaz, covers us and sleeps with us even if we are grains still mixed with chaff. Our spirit goes to Christ to become His bride, untying His sandal straps. The sandals symbolize His gospel. Unbinding the straps signifies revealing the mysteries of the gospel, and once they are revealed, we become Christ's bride.

John's sermon is not fearful but a wonderful story of God's love. When we receive this by faith, God's love comes into us, and as we continue to immerse ourselves in the Word, that love becomes more abundant. The Spirit of love then burns away our unbelief.

Thirdly, when we immerse ourselves in the Jordan, Christ is baptized with us. Verse 21 says that when all the people were baptized, Jesus was baptized too. The original text also implies "it came to pass," which is a promise that it will happen. Jesus is the living water. When we are baptized, the living water enters the water. Just as adding fruit extract to plain water turns it into fruit juice, plain water becomes living water.

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So, then, what happens to us in Christ? As he prays, heaven is opened. Our life's journey becomes a walk towards heaven. Furthermore, we hear a voice from heaven saying, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." When we are immersed in Christ, we are all God's children. At the same time, the Song of Songs is fulfilled through Christ, when the bridegroom says to the bride, "My beloved." When we are constantly immersed in Him, we hear these three voices daily: "You are my son," "I love you," and "I am pleased with you."

When we are immersed in Christ, we experience the Holy Spirit descending on us in the form of a dove. In the Bible, the dove represents the new covenant, eternal reconciliation between God and man, and God's peace. The Spirit of Christ comes to us as a very gentle spirit. This characteristic contrasts with fire. For everything that is not dedicated to God, we experience the Spirit as an ax and fire. Additionally, as powerful cleansing water, as the spirit of the threshing floor, and as the winnowing spirit, He deals with us. In the immersion of Christ, we are under God's entire process of stripping away our outer shell so that our inner life, the grain, is revealed.

In the new year, we often resolve to make new changes. However, we cannot achieve this by our strength alone. Therefore, we need to renew the baptism of immersion every day. We must invite Jesus Christ into every corner of our lives and immerse ourselves in Him. Then Christ will accomplish our transformation. Immerse yourself in the Jordan of the Word daily. Not only will He cleanse you powerfully, winnow you, and burn away the chaff with the fire, but He will also share the loving heavenly voice of the bridegroom, and come to you as the gentle spirit like a dove. May you experience this Christ Jesus anew, and may the grain of life within you be revealed, bringing others into Him as well in this New Year. Amen.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for awakening us to the meaning of baptism today and leading us to immerse ourselves more in You. Thank You for coming to us as the cleansing water to make us Your pure bride, as the gentle Spirit like a dove, and as the fire that burns away the chaff. May we, in this new year, daily untie the laces of Your Word, which must come to pass in us, and enjoy Your love and protection, revealing ourselves as the good grain. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and bridegroom. Amen.