

## EPIPHANY: CELEBRATING GOD'S GIFT FOR ALL PEOPLE

**The Baptism of Our Lord**  
**First Sunday after the Epiphany**  
**January 10, 2010**

**Isaiah 43:1-7**

**Psalm 29**

**Acts 8:14-17**

**Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**

### Watery Transformations

As the lectionary passages celebrate the baptism of Jesus, it is fitting that the theme running through each of them is water. In the beautifully poetic passage from Isaiah that describes the return of the exilic community from Babylon, the prophet uses language reminiscent of the Exodus, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you" (Isaiah 43:2a, *NRSV*). It is through this watery return that exiles are transformed into a nation.

In Psalm 29, we are told that "the voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over mighty waters" (Psalm 29:3, *NRSV*). The psalmist sings of the glory of God being revealed through a thunderstorm. God's voice "flashes forth flames of fire" (verse 7) and "shakes the wilderness" (verse 8). Underlying this metaphorical song is a polemic against the Canaanite storm god, Baal. It is not Baal who controls the thunder, rather it is Yahweh who reigns over all: "The LORD (Yahweh) sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD (Yahweh) sits enthroned as king forever" (verse 10). The psalmist forces a transformation in thinking, i.e. from polytheism to monotheism – another watery transformation.

In Luke, we are told of Jesus' baptism. The word *baptism* occurs over 90 times in the New Testament and is used in various ways. Literally, baptism means to dip. In priestly environments, the utensils used for sacrifices had to be ritually washed, so they were "dipped" or "baptized" in water for purification (see Mark 7:4). After Jesus' "dip," Luke says that "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove" (Luke 3:21b, 22a, *NRSV*). This is yet another watery transformation that inaugurates Jesus' ministry in Luke.

As we celebrate Jesus' baptism by recognizing all of these watery transformations, how do we allow our own watery transformation (or baptism) to inaugurate transformation around us? I'll try to answer that question with a story. A couple of years ago, I had the opportunity to be a part of a mission project in Kenya where we built a child development center that helped AIDS/HIV orphans remain in their community with an extended family. As part of the project, we installed a water pump because locals in that area had

to walk for miles to get clean water. It was humbling to see the watery transformation that happened in that community!

As believers in God who transforms lives through his power, may we be his agents of transformation for the world.

This week's Reflection was prepared by the Rev. K. Jason Coker, an ordained minister with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and pastor of Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Connecticut. Visit [www.wiltonbaptist.org](http://www.wiltonbaptist.org) to learn more about the ministries of Wilton Baptist Church.

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**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Sudan** – With prayers for the new General Secretary, that the Lord will give him wisdom, and with prayers for the Zande translation project which is to relocate to Yambio, and with prayers for the translators and their families. In 2011, South Sudan will vote on whether to be an independent state or remain in a united Sudan; with prayers that this event will pass peacefully and that the choice of the people will be honored; **Ethiopia** – With thanks to God for the purchase of Bible House, for the symposium of the Trinitarian Churches on creating unity, for the distribution of the Amharic Septuagint Bibles and *Proclaimers* of the Tigrigna language, for the increase in local contributions and membership, and for the progress of the *Good Samaritan* program, and with prayers for fruitful results from the branch office in Jimma and for Bible work in **Djibouti** and in **Eritrea**.

**Activity Corner:** “Beloved Children of God” Poster

Supplies needed: Bible; drawing paper and crayons for young children; poster board; marker; pencils or pens.

Compare Luke's version of Jesus' baptism and the preaching of John the Baptist (3:1-22) with those of Matthew (3:13-17) and Mark (1:1-11). What similarities do you find? What differences? Discuss these similarities and differences with members of your household. Young children may be encouraged to draw a picture of the story based on Luke's Gospel.

Read Isaiah 43:1-7. Across the top of a poster board write, “WE ARE BELOVED OF THE LORD” and underneath write, “I Have Called You By Name. You Belong to Me. (Isaiah 43:1)” List the names of everyone in your household (or have everyone write their own name). Invite each one to affix their photo next to their name or to draw a picture of themselves. Encourage everyone to discuss what it means to belong to God. Conclude by singing “Hush, Hush, Somebody's Callin' My Name” or one of your favorite hymns.