

# Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of January 10, 2010

## Baptism by Fire for You and Me (Luke 3:15-22)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. The text for today's homily is from the third chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. Our Lord says to us:

"<sup>21</sup> Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, <sup>22</sup> 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.'"

This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear friends in Christ, I would like to take you back in time to the second century, to a time when Christianity was not the norm of society like it has been perhaps during earlier periods in our life. Today we take a glimpse of his tory when Christianity went against the grain of the culture. I want to tell you about a man of God named Polycarp of the second century. Now Polycarp was the Bishop of the church at Smyrna, which is modern-day Turkey.

A persecution had broken out in Smyrna and many Christians were fed to the wild animals, and bloodthirsty crowd called for the death of the leader of the Christians—that was Polycarp.

Can you imagine what it was like for the church in Smyrna as they watched their beloved and aged pastor burn at the stake? Polycarp was a disciple of one of Jesus' disciples. He was taught by the Apostle John himself. One could tell it immediately because it is said that he possessed the same tenderness and compassion as his mentor.

The Roman authorities sent a search party to find him. Polycarp had been taken into hiding but the Romans tortured two young believers until they finally disclosed his location. When the authorities' arrival was announced there was still time to whisk Polycarp away but he refused to go. He said, "God's will be done."

And in one of the most touching instances of Christian grace imaginable Polycarp welcomed his captors as if they were friends. He talked with them and insisted they eat a meal. He made only one request before being taken away—he asked for one hour to pray. The Roman soldiers granted this request and listened to his prayer. Their hearts melted and they began to have second thoughts. In fact, they were overheard asking each other why they were sent to arrest and put to death such a venerable and pious man.

Other authorities also experienced a warmed heart when Polycarp arrived to answer to the Roman Governor. The Governor tried to find a way to release him too. He said, "Revoke your oath by the genius of Caesar and I will let you go!"

But Polycarp replied: "For eighty-six years I have served Him. He has never done me wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?" Polycarp said: "If you imagine for a moment that I would do that, then I am not who I am. Hear it plainly. I am a Christian."



stubborn refusal to submit to God. Scripture says it and we see the heat of His anger for ours in the

And yet, this was also the most wondrous display of His rich mercy toward us. For Jesus, according to His resurrection, we could be born again and join

Baptism, friends, is more than a religious ceremony with some nice words. At its heart, baptism is where God where He has joined you to Christ to enjoy Him forever and your baptism He sustains your life with Him.

In ancient times, scientists discovered that to nourish an unborn child through the mother's umbilical cord. The sustaining umbilical cord also carries all of the mother, who then eliminates the poisons for her. In your baptism and your connection to Christ, He takes them by His grace. He sustains you through His word, and you keep you healthy each day with His words for

We have been talking about the power of fire; this is what moved Him to die in our place. Fire also has a history of camping with my Cub Scout troop. Most nights, we would usually have a snack of some kind. If we cleaned it by washing it and sometimes, if the knife also held it over the fire briefly to make it clean

Fire makes things clean and it purifies. It refines in a spiritual sense as well. The Holy Spirit came and in your baptism, you also have received the fire

In your baptism, the "old man" with its sinful desires. The sinful self was put to death. You are now born. And each day, the grace of the Holy Spirit calls us to confess our sins, as we repent, and as we receive our Lord.

The fire in which the old is destroyed is, for you, the process of smelting and refining ore, where the impurities and the gold or silver becomes pure.

Indeed, our baptism is a baptism by fire. Baptism brought us into communion with Him; it is where He pours His love to those in our midst; baptism is where precious treasures; and it is where He restores us. The heat to form new objects God continually molds in

Friends, may God's grace ignite your heart and keep the fire of our hearts and set us on fire to abide in His love in Jesus Christ, surely abides with you. Am I all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ

and Hebrews that God is a consuming fire, the death of Christ on the cross.

His warm compassion and His love for us, that His human nature was destroyed to His resurrected life in our baptism.

It is more than a splash of water and what He has made you His beloved child. It is His word. And through your faith in His Word

and oxygen continuously flow to us today, we also know that this life is not a byproduct of a poisonous body waste back to the planet. This is what happens in your sins and death and removing them by His Word. And He longs to feed us from Holy Scripture.

Most notably, it is the fire of God's love that purifies power. I remember as a boy, when we would have a campfire going, if we had a knife for the food, we would have had fallen on the dirty ground, we might

things like gold and silver. This happens on the Day of Pentecost in the form of fire of His grace.

He was drowned and crucified with Christ. You are made alive in Christ. He leads us back to this baptism as we receive abundant forgiveness through Christ

a purifying fire. Scripture compares this to a fire that is burned away by intense heat

where the heat of God's love has been shared with His children so that He refines and purifies us as His gold. Like a blacksmith who uses intense heat in His image.

your lamp burning. May it burn up the impurities and commune with Him day by day. For His peace. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding. Amen.