

1st Sunday After the Epiphany

January 10, 2016

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

Epistle: Acts 10:34-38

Lesson: Is 42:1-7

Psalm: Psalm 45:7-9

CLB Commentary by Pastor Gary Witkop

Luke 3:15-17 & 21-22

Epiphany – the celebration of the coming of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi’s appearance to Jesus. This is the first Sunday after Epiphany, and the text shows Jesus starting his public ministry to all mankind.

Regarding the baptism of the Holy Spirit. –This is not a special or separate event, but one with “normal” baptism. Acts 1:5, 8, 2:3+ The apostles were “baptized with tongues of fire” and power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Acts 10:44+ & 11:15-16+ Peter saw evidence of the Holy Spirit coming upon the gentiles at the home of Cornelius in Caesarea.

Regarding the heavens opening up! –This was a special event that has happened only a few times in the Bible (including to Stephan in Acts 7:56, and to the prophet in Ezekiel 1:1...). A “window” that is normally closed opened and the people were able to see into heaven and the residents of heaven to that scene on earth. A rare occurrence showing the importance of this event.

Regarding the Dove descending onto Jesus. –This is a representation of the Holy Spirit; did it come from the open window to heaven? That would be interesting to know. But regardless, it came from God as a sign to the people, not for Jesus’ sake, but for theirs and our sake and understanding of who Jesus is.

Regarding God speaking from heaven through that open window. –God has spoken many times, Creation, through the prophets, His Word, Jesus’ words... This was the voice of God used to mark this special occasion and show to those who would believe that Jesus was the Messiah, greater than John the Baptist, greater than the prophets, God’s special SON!

The trinity is evident in this passage. God the Father spoke from heaven, the Holy Spirit descended like a Dove, and Jesus was baptized. Trinitarian Baptism is the only valid baptism.

How to preach this text:

There is so much that could be preached on in this text. As evidence to that Lenski devotes almost 20 pages of commentary to these verses. We will all need to focus our words and carefully select what exactly we want to say as led by the Holy Spirit or we can get lost in the volume of what could be said.

Here is one idea:

Law – There is only one Jesus and all must come to him to be saved. We cannot get to heaven on our own, not even John the Baptist or the prophets could. We need Jesus. If John the Baptist needed Jesus (John was not worthy to untie Jesus' sandal), how much more do "normal people" like the crowd there, or we today? We need the washing away of our sin as is done in baptism. Even the baptism that John the Baptist was doing, which wasn't the same as what Jesus would do, was for repentance of sin. We need to repent of our sin and be cleansed. Jesus did not.

Gospel – The triune God is placing his blessing on Jesus here and "anointing" him to begin his public ministry. His baptism wasn't for his sin, but to show to all people that Jesus is the One, God's beloved Son, the messiah, and we need to come to him. If we will come to Jesus, or allow Jesus to come to us, as he did in his life on earth and to John the Baptist and those being baptized by the Jordan river, he will "baptize us with water and fire," washing our sin away and giving us the Holy Spirit to work in and through us in this world. We need to be washed clean of our sin, and we need God's power in us in order to live for and with Jesus and bear fruit in this world. This is available to us, not by our own strength, but through Jesus' gifts to us, the gift of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit.