

A Sense of Baptism

Text: Mark 1:9-11; Isa 42:1-4, 6-7

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Baptism is one of the most important sacraments in the Christian Community and has been practiced for a long time. Since the experience of baptism is usually given only once in life, it remains as a precious and beautiful memory. However, for me, baptism is not a beautiful memory. Because I do not remember my baptism at all. It remains on a faded photo of 37 years ago. I was raised up in the Korean Presbyterian tradition, and my parents had me be baptized as an infant. I am not criticizing my parents - because I also took my two children to infant baptism. Because of my own experience of baptisms, my memories might be very different from the baptism of Jesus.

I've never experienced the excitement of waiting for my turn to be baptized while I stand alongside the baptism spot, the first sense of cold water when I first step into the river, the sense of death when my whole body is completely immersed in the water, and the wonderful sense of relief when I come out of the water as taking the first breath that is my victory over death. I feel like the sense of baptism is one that is far-off from me.

How does Christ's baptism feel to you? The church has been reading today's text to commemorate the beginning of Christ's ministry and of meeting Christ, the Lord, who has been identified by the Holy Spirit as the Son of God. However, the baptism of Jesus doesn't seem realistic. It's like an old story that sounds like a myth. The power and manifestation of God in the story of Jesus' baptism make Jesus' baptism sound even more unrealistic.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry and at the place where Christ reveals Himself to the world, the gospel of Mark shows a magnificent scene that heavens split open, the Holy Spirit descends, and a voice is heard from heaven, verifying Jesus' identity as "the Son of God."



By Woonbo Kim Ki-chang
https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/art/2008/10/148_27288.html

In the Korean ink-and-wash painting of Christ's Baptism, we can see Christ is in the spotlight from heaven and angels are by the open sky. It seems like the whole world around is celebrating his baptism and it seems to be full of mystery. So, the baptism of Christ looks really unrealistic. Nevertheless, according to the testimony of the Bible, the baptismal community believed in the baptism of Christ because the people had been waiting for the power of the Son of God to appear in the world. But it is even more mysterious when we look at today's world. This is because the ministry of the baptized Christ seems to be absent from the world. Christ who was baptized and sent to the world seems to have ascended to heaven and to be absent from the world.

Now, we are having a hard time all over the world due to an unexpected virus. When seeing the medical staff struggling to save lives every day, nursing homes isolated due to mass infections, empty streets, people who have lost their jobs, and people who are not safe in their own places, we can easily think that it would've been great if Jesus, who was baptized and was sent to the world, would be with us.

With his disciples, Jesus would've visited a nursing home and healed people who were confined and could not even have visits from their families. Jesus would've comforted those who were mentally afflicted with the virus. For those who lost their job and who are hungry,

Jesus would've done miracles. Jesus would've stopped to visit a grade school and would've hugged young children who had to study all day wearing masks. Jesus would've offered safe places to those who were exposed to violence at their home and who were unprotected in the streets.

Though we seek the One who made the raging seas become calm (Mark 4:39) and who come like a rushing stream (Isaiah 59:19), it seems that the triune God in Christ's baptism is too far away from us.

However, when we think about the scene in today's text, we meet a slightly different God. Christ was with a large crowd being baptized that day. They were baptized by John the Baptist; they were confessing their sins (Mk 1:4). That means they were sinners. Christ was not a sinner. And no prophet says that Christ had to be baptized to begin his ministry. Nonetheless, Christ was baptized among sinners with the hands of a sinner. The God hidden in the splendid baptism of Christ was the God who was in solidarity with sinners and finally took charge of all suffering on the cross.

At the end of Jesus' ministry, James and John asked Christ if, in heaven, they could sit on his left and right. Then Jesus answered with a question: "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Mark 10:38)

The cup takes us to Gethsemane. In Gethsemane, the sweat from the head of Christ - who embraced within himself all our sins, sorrows, pains, and injustice and who prayed for endurance on his path of suffering - eventually became like great drops of blood falling on the ground (Luke 22:44). When Jesus cried out to the unanswering God to take the cup from him (Luke 22:42), the image of the drops flowing down from his head reminds us of where his mission began, the place of baptism – it was at the place of baptism.

The falling drops draw us on the path of suffering. The drops flow down from the head of Christ and from the deeply pierced side of the crucified Christ and who cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Mark 15:34)." the image of the drops flowing down from Jesus' whole body reminds us of where his mission began, the place of baptism – This was a baptism of water and blood (Mark 15:38).

At the moment of being immersed in the water as feeling death,
at the moment of taking his first breath after he rose out of the waters of baptism,
and at the moment of the water of baptism dropping from the top of his head,
Christ may have seen himself in the scene of Gethsemane who were lamenting.

Christ may have seen the crucified self who embraced all suffering and all wrong things in the world.

A sense of Baptism is linked not only to the Christ who is the Son of God in glory (Mk 1:11) but also to the Christ who is weeping with sinners and sufferers, the Christ who is falling to the earth embracing the depths of all pain in the world, Christ who knew no sin, but who is being out sin (2 Cor 5:21), and Christ who could not take his first breath after his death unless he first gave himself to us.

Let us look and see the Christ, our Lord, the one whom God anointed at his baptism.

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.
He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and
the coastlands wait for his teaching (Isaiah 42:1-4).

Now, we return to the place of Christ's baptism. Christ is standing with us. We are

standing with Jesus through the Holy Spirit in the spot of our baptism again.

Remember Jesus' baptism.

Remember your baptism.

Remember our baptism.

From this poem written by Les Miller, we can see the baptized Christ who is living and working among us

If Christ Walked across this land today

Where would he go?

To the vineyard of Niagara? (...)

To be tempted from the top of the CN Tower?

To Spend a freezing evening waiting in line for shelter on Queen Street, being. good news? (...)

To preach in a roadside chapel in rural Alberta?

To heal alongside the nurses and doctors at Sick kids' Hospital in Toronto?

To teach the unloved in our schools that they are loved?

To walk the snowy streets of east-end Montreal with a few of his friend? (...)

To be crucified on Parliament Hill?

To be buried and raised on the cemetery overlooking Placentia?¹

Yes, maybe Miller is right. The baptized Christ is present in and among people wherever there are people who love him. Do we have the courage to see Christ's presence in a way we may not expect?

We see Christ in the medical staff struggling to save a life despite poor sleep and insufficient medical equipment. We see Christ in a citizen who left 820,000 dollars in front of the police station for helping the needy. We see Christ in the people who delivered food to the elderly who could not go outside. We see Christ in the hearts of those who made masks for others who could not afford to pay for masks. We see the baptized Jesus through them - dwelling among us and working in us.

Let's come back to our baptism.

In baptism, we come to life from the other side of death because of Jesus' bloody and nailed hands. When we are choked by the power of great evil, injustice, and sin, and when the silence of death lays heavy in our lives, we are raised by Christ's hand and take our first breath in baptism. When we come out of the water and open our eyes, we face the eyes of Christ, who was baptized with water and blood and who carries our pain in his body. We see, in Christ's eyes, love, passion, lament, and hope. Then, we feel the Holy Spirit coming on us. We are baptized with Jesus and are sent into the world with Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

As a baptized community, we have been invited to live in the presence of Christ. Now we hear the voice from Heaven.

You are my children, my Beloved; with you I am well pleased (Mark 1:11).

I have called you in righteousness,

I have taken you by the hand and kept you;

I have given you as a covenant to the people,

a light to the nations,

to open the eyes that are blind,

¹ Les Miller, "If Christ Walked across This Land," in *Northern Light: A Canadian Prayer Book* (Toronto, ON: Novalis Publishing, 2020), 29.

to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness (Isaiah 42:6-7)

The One who is in us through the Holy Spirit is Christ who died on the cross and has risen, the One who dwells with us, the One who works with the people baptized by the water and the Holy Spirit, and the One who makes us confess that Jesus is our Savior, and we live by following his footsteps. Amen.