

Sermon Luke 3 15 22 1st S af Epiphany Series C

Sermon: 1st Sunday after Epiphany

Text: Luke 3:15-22 (vv.21-22)

Theme: The baptism in our daily life.

Goal: We become children of God through the Baptism. Let's live the new life!

Dear Friends,

Introduction: We are beginning the new Sunday School Curriculum for this year today. It is based on the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther. Bible Stories were selected related to the six chief parts of the Catechism: The Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Baptism, The Confession and Absolution, and the Lord's Supper. The children will learn by heart the main parts of the Catechism (not the big explanations). The general goal is to grow always as God's Children! As the children are growing physically and mentally, and are developing their skills gradually, so they have to grow spiritually as well, developing their spiritual gifts. Without food there is no growth; without spiritual food, there is no development in the Christian life.

Parents play a very important role in this process, and you are called to do a good follow up of the Sunday School lessons with your children. They have a file with the lesson of the day, a picture and the memory verse. – Even if you don't have children or grandchildren in the Sunday School, as a Christian family you are part of this process as you welcome the children in the church, have patience with them, and show them your love as well. The children love to feel themselves at home at the church and they cannot come scared or afraid. They have to know that they have a big family here: Lots of siblings in Christ, uncles and aunts, grandpas and grandmas in Christ. – We have a meeting with the parents and grandparents after the service to present the schedule for this year. Please, stay for the meeting.

I – Children of God

The text for today is appropriated for this Sunday. It presents Jesus' Baptism and what it means for our daily life.

We know that Jesus didn't need to be baptized because He didn't have sins to be forgiven. But He accomplished everything on our behalf, even the Baptism. And what happened in Jesus' Baptism happens when we and our children are baptized. God the Father declares us His beloved children as He declared about Jesus: "You are my Son, whom I love." And we receive the Holy Spirit as a special gift of God.

John wrote in his first letter (1 John 3:1): "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" And in his Gospel he says (John 1:12): "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." This is the New Birth Jesus had talked about to Nicodemus in John 3.

The Old Testament reading for today has a very nice statement of God: "But now, this is what the LORD says— He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine." (Isaiah 43:1). – In the film 'Martin Luther', the Reformer prays several times: *"I am Yours; help me!"* – We can be sure that we and our children belong to God by His grace since we were baptized.

And we receive the Holy Spirit at our Baptism. Paul wrote to the Galatians 4:4-7: "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son... to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who call out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir." –The Holy Spirit

guides us in the new life and nurtures us with the Word and the Sacrament that we may grow healthy and strong as children of God.

II – The New Life

The Apostle Paul links our baptism with the death and resurrection of Jesus in the Epistle for today: Romans 6:1-11. Martin Luther quoted Paul in his fourth explanation of the Baptism, when he talks about the New Life in Christ. Without Jesus' death and resurrection there is no Baptism, neither salvation nor anything related to our relationship with God. Paul wrote: "...all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life..."

Death and resurrection – Baptism and a new life. This is the relationship. We have died for sin, and we are alive for Jesus. Maybe our children are not conscious about this; but the Holy Spirit is still working on them. We cannot hinder them in their Christian growth by a bad way of life or by not bringing them to the church. Jesus is very sharp in this issue; He says: "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

The African Bible Commentary writes about the new live in the church: *Our spirituality needs to be anchored in Word and Sacrament, including corporate worship, prayer, Bible Study and the African understanding of what it is to be human, namely a social being, a being in relation to others. To put it differently, such spirituality is based on love and mutual respect instead of on competition, jealousy and hatred. The outreached hand of another should not grope in a void but should find prayerful friendship in my outreached hand. In short, the church needs a spirituality*

where we find each other, where we respect each other, where we reconcile with each other as sisters, brothers, colleagues, comrades, families and helpmates... all Christians have been called and commissioned through baptism to serve God, one another, and the whole creation. (ABC 1210, 1211).

Conclusion: We have to go daily back to our Baptism, where our Christian new life began and where we received the forgiveness by God grace for the very first time. Remembering Jesus' Baptism on this First Sunday after Epiphany we are reminded about our Baptism as well. Do you know when you were baptized? It's good to check it. Your Baptismal Certificate is your I.D. as citizen of the Kingdom of God. I always like to remind our three children year after year of their Baptismal Day. You can do the same with your children, maybe even a small party, a cake...

Our Gospel says that Jesus, after He was baptized, "as He was praying, heaven was open..." Our prayer on behalf of our children and grandchildren opens the heaven and opens God's heart to bless them and to send them the Holy Spirit. They will grow by God's grace in the true faith and will be strengthened in their Christian life. Our Watchword for his year is: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it"

(Proverbs 22:6). The Christian education of our children will be highlighted during the year. We as church are trying to give them a good Christian training; but we cannot do it without your support. Don't impede your children coming to the Sunday School. Bring them gladly always. You will feel God's blessing upon them and upon your family lives as well. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterless
Cape Town, 13 January 2013