

They Worshiped...But Some Doubted

Holy Trinity

Pastor Josh Frazee

Matthew 28:16-20

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Following right on the heels of Pentecost Sunday, we are looking at baptism this morning. John the Baptist had prophesied that after him would come one who would baptize with fire. This one who would follow was our Lord Jesus.

Yet, when you hear the phrase “baptism of fire,” what comes to your mind? Is it the reception of the Holy Spirit by the apostles at Pentecost? Is it the work of the Holy Spirit in those baptized in water with the Word at this church or others? Or do you more often consider a grueling first experience or perhaps a soldier’s first battle?

If you go to dictionary.com, you may be surprised to find that the top definition for the phrase “baptism by fire” is “spiritual sanctification as a gift of the Holy Ghost.” This is the case even though it seems that more often than not the idea which comes to mind is that of a challenging first experience.

Is this why so many today are afraid to have their children baptized? Or that they feel they must wait for their children to get older so that they can choose to be baptized?

Make no mistake, baptism puts an individual in Satan’s path. But baptism is not intended for evil but for good, according to God’s loving purposes. This morning we’ll take a look at the intention of baptism as we hear from our Gospel text from Matthew chapter twenty-eight.

Verse 1

At the opening of our text, it says that “the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.”

One could consider Jesus’ appearance to His disciples here a baptism by fire, of sorts. The disciples had not been the most intelligent people of their time, but they knew that people did not rise from the dead. So the very fact that Jesus, their Lord and brother, was now standing before them was a trial to them—as we can hear from the words “but some doubted.” As you know, this event was not their introduction to the faith, but it was still a severe test of their ability to believe and to trust that this was indeed the Lord Jesus standing before them after they had just witnessed His suffering and death only a short time before.

It would not have been easy for the disciples to believe their eyes seeing their Lord standing before them in general, but especially not after seeing Him flogged, forced to carry His own cross, and nailed to that cross and dying on it. Jesus’ death was, after all, a stumbling block for many since they did not believe the Messiah to come was supposed to die. They believed He would restore the kingdom of the line of David here on earth, and that that kingdom would be an eternal one. We know today that Jesus’ kingdom is an eternal one, it’s just not of this world. When these people saw Jesus die, and not just die, but be crucified, they must have thought that there was no way He could have been the Messiah because they must have thought that no one would be coming back from such a death. And so for the disciples here to have some doubt and to have a hard time grasping that this was indeed Jesus before them is not so hard to believe.

Is it ever hard for you to believe that Jesus was truly raised from the dead? Or to believe that your brothers and sisters will rise again just as Jesus did? Do you ever have trouble grasping that those brothers and sisters who rise again who believed in Jesus as their Lord and Savior will enter—with you—into the new

heaven and new earth promised in the Scriptures? By the work of the Holy Spirit at work in your hearts, you believe this to be true, yet it may still be overwhelming to grasp—just as it was for the disciples here in our text. But even though there was some doubt and trouble grasping everything, the disciples worshiped Jesus—they worshiped Him as they would God Himself, because they recognized that Jesus is God Himself, God the second person.

Verse 2

“Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...’”

While the previous verses presented a case of baptism by fire, these verses give Jesus’ command that the disciples—and every disciple who has lived all the way to us—that we baptize all nations. This baptism would truly be the baptism of fire that John the Baptist had declared and prophesied would happen. This baptism would give its recipients the Holy Spirit’s working of faith and trust in the forgiveness of sins. As we learn in the Explanation of the Small Catechism: “In Baptism, the Holy Spirit works faith and so creates in us new spiritual life with the power to overcome sin (p. 213).”

So, how are we to baptize? Baptism is properly administered when water is applied to an individual by either sprinkling or dunking with the Word of God being spoken: “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” We baptize in the name of the Holy Trinity because “(i)t means that in (those) Baptism(s), God, the Holy Trinity, receives (those people) into communion or fellowship with Himself (Explanation of Small Catechism, p.205).”

We don’t baptize in any other name or any other way because this is the only way which our Lord Jesus Christ gave in His command and instruction. We also do not need to baptize more than once. God has given us His Word through His Son Jesus that He will work forgiveness of sins and faith in this method, so we can take Him at His Word. To believe that a baptism quote-unquote “didn’t take” or anything like that doubts what God has said regarding this great gift and sacrament.

Verse 3

Jesus concluded saying, “...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Jesus’ baptism of fire is not the end of the story. We are called and commanded not only to baptize, but also to teach all that He has commanded us. This doesn’t just mean the commandments, it means all that He has taught us in His Word, both Law and Gospel.

We are not able to keep the Law, either before or after our baptisms. If we try to look to our works to see that we are saved, we are, in essence, trying to see that our works are worthy of being saved. But our works are never worthy of salvation. They deserve nothing but hell and condemnation—yes, not only our sins, but even our most perfect of our works are not worthy of salvation. That’s why we need to teach others to observe and we ourselves need to observe the Gospel, that Jesus has paid the price for all sins by His death on the cross of Calvary.

By His death, He has also made it possible for God to be with us to the end of the age. This year our focus has been on how even the Reformation is still all about Jesus. This is true of our entire lives. Without

His death and resurrection, neither our lives nor being baptized itself would be worth anything. But because He has died and risen again, baptism now saves you and me. God has received you and me into fellowship with Him. And our view of God is now complete—knowing and believing God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, and God the Son, who is our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. In Him alone we have the forgiveness of sins, salvation, and life everlasting. In Jesus' Name. Amen.