

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Baptism of our Lord

January 7, 2001

I remember an assignment – I think it was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Tell about what will happen when you grow up. Now I can't remember what I wrote – but I remember being startled by what the girl who sat next to me was writing. She had great expectations. She described the husband she would one day marry, the children she would one day have. She even described the house they would all live in. I had never even thought about such things but she had her life all mapped out. I wonder how it all turned out for her – whether it happened the way she expected.

Every four years we all learn some things about expectations. Candidates tell us what to expect if they are elected and then nothing turns out as they predicted.

Expectations – Reality. The distance between them is great.

So when our gospel reading begins by telling us that ~~be~~<sup>the</sup> people were filled with expectation we might suspect that we are in for a surprise. They were expecting the Messiah – they already knew what they expected – good times, victory over enemies, prosperity when the Messiah came. Are you the Messiah they asked John?

John said, "I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming: I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize with the holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear the threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

They expected a Messiah – John was saying – Expect a judge.

Now Luke tells us in the part that ~~was~~ not included in the gospel selection that John was arrested by Herod, and thrown into prison. John was no Messiah.

Would the righteous judge John expected be coming after him? This is how Luke continues. Now when all the people were baptized and Jesus had also been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased."

No winnowing fork, no fire, just the gentle spirit coming from God and resting on Jesus and God speaking,  
You are my Son.

In one sense the whole telling of the story of Jesus is about the crushing of expectations. God's Son would have great power, just as everyone might expect, but before long he would be dying on the cross in weakness. Instead of the fire of his holiness consuming sinners Jesus would party with them, sharing wine and food. Finally instead of staying dead in the grave he would rise to life everlasting.

And how about now, in your life? What do you expect from God? what do you get? I always expect that the blessing of God will bring smooth roads and sunshiny days. Yet I have learned to trust in God when someone I love is in danger, when someone is not home when I expect, when the doctor says, "Please bring your spouse with you, I want to talk about what the tests showed.

You are my Son the Beloved. With you I am well pleased.

How wonderful those words sound. What marvelous expectations Jesus might have had!

And where did that Spirit that came down like a dove lead Jesus? To the wilderness for forty days of testing.

In the last new members class I asked, When did you feel closest to God? One after another spoke of times of fear, times of suffering, times of testing. Not what we expect.

What does your baptism mean? That you are a child of God, that the Holy Spirit that came to Jesus now dwells in you? That God loves you, takes pleasure in you? Certainly it means all of these things. But does it also mean that you will be tested as Jesus was tested? That you will die as Jesus died, be raised as Jesus was raised? What do you expect?

I expect that you will find God not more predictable than the crowds who were expecting the Messiah did. You will find that you will receive blessings you have never imagined and that you will survive terrors you never ~~thought~~ <sup>thought</sup> you could survive. And if God keeps hold of your hand through it all and gives you the faith to believe

~~then~~ then you will find that there is reason to give thanks for everything that comes,  God will find a way to work for your good through it all.

What can you expect? You can expect the love of God to pursue you until God owns your heart for all eternity. That is what Jesus baptism meant, what your baptism means.

And you can expect that God will surprise you – touching your life through the very people you would never expect that God would. Keep believing – God will keep surprising

If there is a word of warning in all of this it is this: A lot of those folks who were looking for the Messiah never embraced Jesus. Their arms were so full of their expectations that there was no room for Jesus.

I wonder about that girl who sat next to me in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Did she get her house, the husband she dreamed of, those perfect children? I am sure she didn't. But if she is trusting in God this day, I am sure she is not disappointed.