



BAPTISM

Sunday, January 23, 2011

(Be sure to view the great videos and links included with this material.)

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The unit you are viewing, Baptism, is a compact unit. This means that it is not a complete commentary of the Scripture(s) selected for this day on the calendar, nor does it have a full, supporting cultural resource unit and worship unit. Instead, to enliven the imagination of preachers and teachers, we have provided a sermon outline, songs, suggested books, and suggested articles, links, and videos. For additional information see Baptism in the archives of the Lectionary for 2008 and 2009. In 2009 Baptism was celebrated with Epiphany. 2011 is the first year that the African American Lectionary has posted compact units for moments on its liturgical calendar.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment: Baptism

Dr. Brad Braxton writes in the 2008 Lectionary commentary for Baptism:

Baptism comes from the Greek word *baptize*, meaning to intensively immerse in water. The word also connotes ceremonial washing for purification. For the Christian community, baptism symbolically establishes or affirms a person's relationship with God. While often associated with the ministry of John the Baptist, baptism is—in the most

radical sense—a willingness to join Jesus in death (Mark 10:38 and Romans 6:3). John's baptism anticipated the Messiah to come. Today, baptism honors the Messiah who has come, acknowledges the Messiah who is, and awaits the Messiah who is coming again.

African American churches conduct baptism in various ways. Some baptize persons after they publicly confess their faith in Jesus Christ. Others baptize infants or children on the basis of family members' faith in Jesus Christ and the family's connection with that particular congregation. Also, the method of administration varies from full immersion to pouring or sprinkling of water. Seriousness and celebration surround African American services of baptism; for the person being baptized both dies and rises to new life simultaneously.¹

With this material as our backdrop, we provide a sermon outline for Baptism.

II. Baptism: Sermonic Outline

A. Sermonic Focus Text(s): Mark 10:35-39 and Luke 3:21-22 (New Revised Standard Version)

Mark 10:35-39

(v. 35) James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' (v. 36) And he said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' (v. 37) And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' (v. 38) But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' (v. 39) They replied, 'We are able.' Then Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized;...

Luke 3:21-22

(v. 21) Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, (v. 22) 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.'

B. Possible Titles

- i. Pleasing God
- ii. When God Is Pleased
- iii. Benefits of Baptism

C. Point of Exegetical Inquiry

In any text there can be several words or phrases that require significant exegetical inquiry. One exegetical inquiry raised by this text is that there is considerable discussion and debate regarding the Epiphany moment of Christ. The controversy seems to be embroiled over whether or not the Epiphany occurs during the visit of the Magi, the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan by John, or at

the foot of the cross during Jesus' crucifixion when the Centurion Soldier exclaimed, "Surely, this was the Son of God."

In either event the revelatory moment is one wherein the Messianic Mission of Jesus is made clear in an almost miraculous way. Either by conveyance of some secret knowledge as is in the case of the Visit of the Magi; the Divine or Epiklesic Pronouncement as is exhibited in the Baptismal scene at the Jordan River; or in the wakes of the throws of death as personal revelation is experienced by the soldier who watches intently as life leaves the mortal frame of Jesus on Golgotha.

One might do well to consider that the Epiphanic Reality is not one that occurs in a single and solitary instance, but rather is a continual unfolding revelation from the cradle to the cross. Thus, this demonstrates that our understanding of the manifestation of Christ is a continual unfolding revelation throughout our life's journey; baptism is a large step on that journey.

III. Introduction

It must have been an exciting day! That day out on the shores of the Jordan River as the standing crowds pushed and pressed on the shoreline to hear a preacher called John. He was announcing the coming of a new Kingdom. A rustic fellow was he, unshaven, almost unkempt dressed in a camel-skin Tunic. It was even noised about that he enjoyed a strange and peculiar diet of locust and wild honey. This was the John who stood on the muddy banks of the Jordan preaching to the crowds, encouraging the people to prepare themselves for a great "*Adventus*", the coming of an esteemed dignitary. His preachments were grounded in some of the great prophetic utterances of the Patriarchs of the Faith. Like Isaiah, he spoke of "making the paths straight" and "exalting valleys" and leveling mountains all while "smoothing out the rough spots."

Then he invited people to be baptized. This baptismal activity was no new intervention created by him. After all, it was quite a common practice in the synagogue, where people would come for these ceremonial cleansing rites. But on this day Preacher John was calling the people not just to a cleansing ritual, but to an induction into a New Kingdom by means of repentance. He even said there would be another Baptism conducted by an unnamed person mightier than himself "whose sandals he was unworthy to unlatch." And THAT baptism, said he, would not just be a water baptism, but it would be with something called "the Holy Ghost and with fire."

Then it happened; from out of the crowd he stepped forth. It was John's cousin, Mary and Joseph's oldest boy. He presented himself to John right there in the turbid and brackish waters of the Jordan. Washerwomen who had been busy doing their laundry a few feet away, fishermen mooring their small fishing vessels while pulling and cleaning their nets, and children frolicking and playing in the intermittent waves that dashed against the shore all seemed to pause and take notice as he came up out of the water. A small white dove descended upon the baptismal candidate. Then a voice thundered, "You are my son, my beloved son, I am well pleased!"

IV. Moves/Points

Move/Point One – No One Wants to Be a Disappointment

- a. Children naturally want to please their parents;
- b. God is our Creator Parent; and
- c. It hurts us emotionally and spiritually when we displease God.

Move/Point Two – Baptism Is a Public Expression of Admission into God’s Family

- a. The “water” in Baptism is a symbol of spiritual cleansing;
- b. The Baptismal action is a symbol of the start of a new birth and consequently a new life in Christ; and
- c. The Baptismal Covenant is our statement of commitment to follow Christ.

Move/Point Three – God Is Pleased When We Choose to Follow Christ

- a. We are given freedom to choose how to fashion our lives;
- b. We may choose to follow the world, the flesh, or the Devil; and
- c. Choosing to follow Christ pleases God.

V. Celebration

Back in my barefoot, boyhood days in Bogalousa, Louisiana, I can remember hearing the choir in my father’s church singing a song that still rings true with me.

“I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back!
Though I may wander, I still will follow;
Though I may wander, I still will follow;
Though I may wander, I still will follow;
No turning back, no turning back!

The world behind me, the cross before me;
The world behind me, the cross before me;
The world behind me, the cross before me;
No turning back, no turning back!

Though none go with me, still I will follow;
Though none go with me, still I will follow;

Though none go with me, still I will follow;
No turning back, no turning back!”²

VI. Illustration(s)

Letting Your Dad Down

When I started college there came those parties that you get invited to and I was going to drive my car to go pick up my girlfriends and go off to the party. Now, before I left, my father told me that I had to be back home at a certain hour. And I said, “What time, Daddy?” He said, “Two o’clock at the latest.” Now, two o’clock back then was a long time, but it wasn’t enough time for me. And so, I said “OK,” but deep down inside I really wasn’t happy because after all I’m driving. I’ve got to pick everybody up, and you know after the party, we’ve got to go to White Castle to get something to eat... I don’t remember exactly what time it was when I rolled up in front of the house, but all I can tell you is that the birds were tweeting... Everybody was asleep. So, I tiptoed to my room in the dark, took off my clothes, found my pajamas in my drawer, put them on and ran over to my bed to pull back the covers. But in the process I felt this piece of paper in my bed. So, I turned on the light and I read what it said. It said, “Mop”—that’s what my daddy called me. That was my nickname. “Mop, you let me down.”

Well, those words, “You let me down,” ring loudly in my ear even today. And, they touched my spirit like the words in 1st Samuel 15:10-13, when Samuel told Saul that the Lord was sorry that he made him king. Can you imagine that? That the Lord would put you in a position and later say, “I’m sorry that I made you _____,” and you fill in the blank.

— Rameh Wright, ‘God’s Word and Our Salvation.’

The African American Pulpit (Summer 2006), p. 79

This illustration is taken from the Sermon Illustrations section of the African American Lectionary.

See the Sermon Illustrations section of the African American Lectionary for additional illustrations that you may wish to use in presenting a sermon for this moment on the liturgical calendar.

VII. Sounds, Sights, Colors, in These Passages

Mark 10:35-39

Sounds: James and John coming to Jesus, the disciples speaking to Jesus and he to them;

Sights: The certainty on the faces of the disciples, the questioning look on the face of Jesus, images indicative of baptism into the life of Jesus; and

Colors: The colors of the clothing worn by the disciples, the colors of the clothes worn by Jesus and the color of his shoes.

Luke 3:21-22

Sounds: Water splashing as people are being baptized in the Jordan river, the heavens opening,

the Holy Spirit descending, a voice from heaven speaking approvingly of Jesus;

Sights: People being immersed in a river of water, the Holy Spirit descending as dove, the looks on the faces of the people and on the face of Jesus as a voice from heaven speaks; and

Colors: The blue water of the Jordan, the white clothing of those being baptized, the white dove and her pink beak.

VIII. Songs to Accompany This Sermon

A. Spiritual(s)

- Take Me to the Water. Traditional Negro Spiritual (sung during *Baptism*)
- Wade in the Water. Negro Spiritual Here are some classic performances.
 1. The Staples. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_g4sDspW9Uc accessed 5 December 2010
 2. The Brotherhood, on Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky broadcast, 2007. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhjGzBCOw88> accessed 5 December 2010
 3. Take 6 LIVE. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkKyeGSiscQ> accessed 5 December 2010
 4. The Voices of Unity Youth Choir. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iC-1_8fYDUo

B. Liturgical Dance Music

- Alvin Ailey Dance “Wade in the Water” from Revelations

C. Invitational Song(s)

- I Have Decided to Follow Jesus. Arr. by Sundar Singh
- Savior Lead Me Lest I Stray. By Frank Davis
- My Faith Looks Up to Thee. By Ray Palmer. Tune, (OLIVET), by Lowell Mason

D. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2005-2010)

- What If God Is Unhappy with Our Praise. By Christopher Brinsom
- Say So. By Israel Houghton

IX. Videos, Audio, and/or Interactive Media

Historical: "Black Delta Religion." Online location: <http://www.folkstreams.net/film.82> accessed 12 December 2010. Rare 8mm footage from rural black church service with a full immersion baptism, Mississippi Delta, 1968 accessed 5 December 2010

Modern: "November Baptism Testimonies." Abundant Life Christian Fellowship, Mountain View, California. Online location: http://www.alcf.net/media_player.asp?messageID=49971 or click at http://www.alcf.net/pages/page.asp?page_id=8939 accessed 5 December 2010

X. Books to Assist in Preparing Sermons or Bible Studies Related to Baptism

- True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary (Mark). Blount, Brian K. gen. ed. Cain Hope Felder, Clarice Martin, and Emerson B. Powery assoc. eds. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007. pp. 141-142 and 163-164.
- Luke (Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching). Craddock, Fred B. "Luke 3:21-22: The Baptism of Jesus." Westminster John Knox Press, 1991. p. 50.

XI. Links to Helpful Websites for Baptism

Brackney, William H. "Believer's Baptism." Doing Baptism Baptist Style: Documents for Faith and Witness. Brentwood, TN: Baptist History and Heritage Society and Vidalia, GA: William H. Whitsitt Baptist Heritage Society. Online location: <http://www.baptisthistory.org/pamphlets/baptism.htm> accessed 5 December 2010

Staten, Annie, and Susan Roach. "Take Me to the Water: African American River Baptism." 1996. Louisiana Department of the Arts. Online location: http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/creole_art_river_baptism.html accessed 5 December 2010

***Disability Awareness Information:** This year the African American Lectionary wants all churches to do a better job of including the disabled/differently abled. Please consider the following when planning, during all worship services, and all other church activities:

We need to give people with disabilities access to society's most important place: our compassionate hearts. In fact, if we each begin with opening our hearts, access to our church buildings, programs, and our lives will be a natural expression of welcoming all God's children into the community of Christ's body, freely and without prejudice. Our proactive inclusion of adults and children with disabilities into the full life of our churches then will become the living and best example of being like Christ.

"Communication and Etiquette with Persons with Disabilities." Shepard, Charlotte, Wineva Hankamer, and Devorah Greenstein. Equal Access Guide: The National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA Committee on Disabilities, in 2004. The Episcopal Disability Network. Online location: <http://www.disability99.org/id69.html> accessed 5 December 2010

XII. Notes for Select Songs

B. Liturgical Dance Music

- Alvin Ailey Dances “Wade in the Water” from Revelations. Interviews with Alvin Ailey dancers as they prepare for the 50th anniversary performance in December 2010 of the classic African American ballet Revelations.

In this sacred, joyful section — captured here moments before “Wade in the Water,” in which rippling sheets of silk are held across the stage — a woman prepares for her baptism. Linda Celeste Sims, at left, second from right, said: “It’s about cleansing and changing and becoming someone better. The beauty of ‘Revelations’ is that we are all dealing with something, and it doesn’t matter what religion or race or nationality we are. We can start to move ahead — not worrying so much about the past, but continuing forward. It’s like you’re being baptized.”

For Ms. Jamison, it depicts a serious ritual of the church: “The baptism is one of the holiest events in the church, particularly in the black church, and so being completely submerged in that water and brought up and having a new life is what that is about. In that we see hope.”

Kourlas, Gia. “Moved by the Spirit: Celebrating ‘Revelations’ at 50.” New York Times 29 November 2010. Online location:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/30/arts/dance/30revelations.html> accessed 8 December 2010

- Slide Show from Alvin Ailey Dances “Wade in the Water” from Revelations. Online location: <http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2010/11/29/arts/dance/20101130-ailey-ss.html> accessed 8 December 2010

C. Invitational Song(s)

- I Have Decided to Follow Jesus. Text: Ascribed to an Indian prince; as sung in Garo, Assam. Tune, (ASSAM).
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #400
- Savior, Lead Me Lest I Stray. By Frank Davis
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. #473
- My Faith Looks Up to Thee. By Ray Palmer. Tune, (OLIVET), by Lowell Mason.
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. #456

D. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2005–2010)

- What If God Is Not Happy with Our Praise. By Christopher Brinson
Location:
Brinson, Christopher. Christopher Brinson and the Ensemble. Jackson, MS: Malaco Records, 1997.
- Say So. By Israel Houghton
Location:
Houghton, Israel and New Breed. A Deeper Level Live. Mobile, AL: Integrity Music, 2007.

Notes

1. For more information, consult Lars Hartman, “Baptism,” in The Anchor Bible Dictionary, volume I, ed. David Noel Freedman. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992, pp 583-594.
2. I Have Decided to Follow Jesus. Text ascribed to an Indian prince; as sung in Garo, Assam. Tune, (ASSAM).