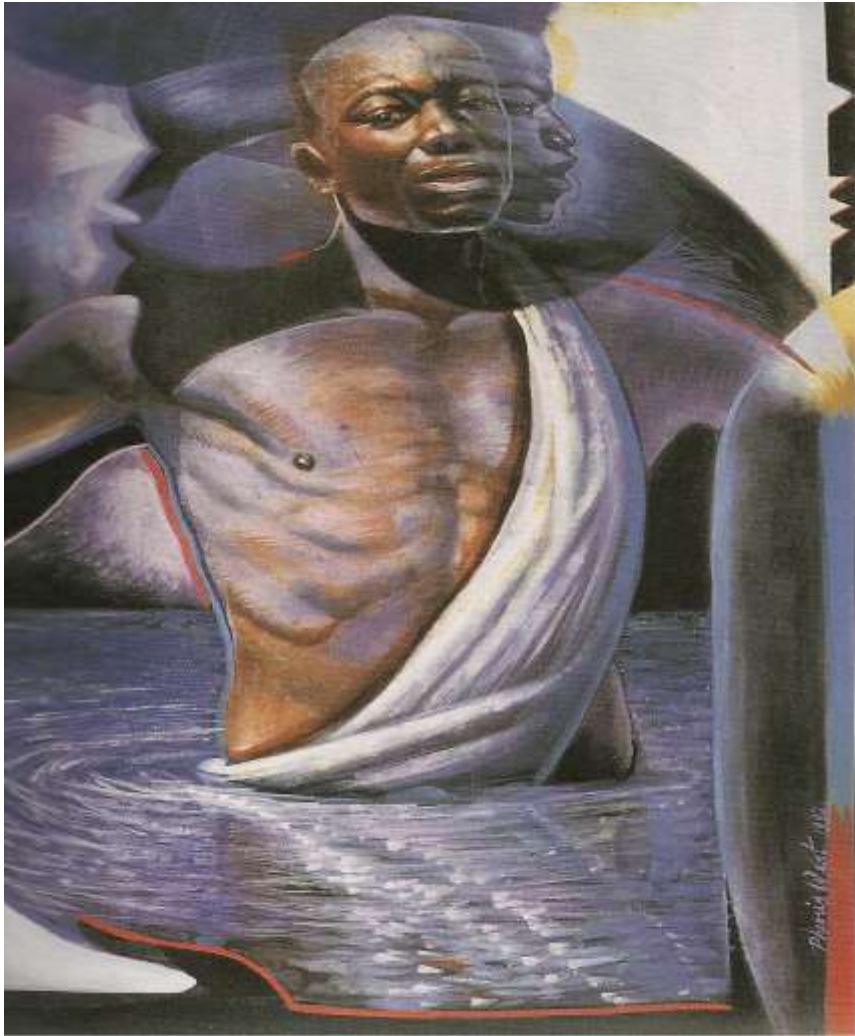


Acts 8:14-17

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them: they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.



The Baptism of Jesus by Pheoris West

“Remembering Our Baptism”

Water. In Luke’s telling of the Baptism of Jesus, John the Baptist made it clear that his baptism was strictly for repentance and the forgiveness of sins. “I baptize you with water . . .” John then goes on to say, “but one who is more powerful than I is coming: I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Fire. The first Easter people experienced that fire as the original blessing of Holy identity as beloved children of God. It was the life transforming, spirit empowering grace of knowing who and whose they were. It set their hearts aglow with the compassionate Love of Jesus for God, self, and neighbor. “Remember your baptism!” Martin Luther would remind his parishioners years later. “A truly Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism once begun and ever to be continued.”

Holy Spirit. Rev. Huey wondered, ‘Why in the world would those crowds, with Jesus among them, make the trek out into the wilderness to listen to a wild-eyed prophet warn them about fire and winnowing, and to let him drag them down into a muddy river to (ironically) cleanse them of their sins and mark a new beginning to their lives?’ Was it was the convergence of evil dark times and the deep hope that John might be the Lord’s Messiah? Luke is silent on those questions, but what we can glean from the account is that Jesus “goes into the waters of the Jordan a carpenter and comes out a Messiah. He is the same person, but with a new direction. His being is the same, but his going is about to take a radical turn. It’s a subtle twist on the notion of ‘repentance,’ which means a turning away, taking a new direction. Jesus doesn’t have to turn away from sin, but he is turning towards his ministry”. (taken from “Sacramental Mud” in *Mixed Blessings* by B.B. Taylor). When the apostles Peter and John laid their hands on the Samaritan who had been baptized in the name of Jesus, he received the Holy Spirit’s empowerment for sharing in Christ’s ministry. It was the experience of belonging to something larger than himself. It was the experience of participating in the Divine Story of Eternal Life.

In our church tradition we remember who and whose we are and what we are about in Christ throughout the liturgical year. In her poem, 'The Church Year', Ann Weems remembers for us the grace of Jesus, God, Spirit who richly blesses us each season.

### The Church Year

The church is Advent. The unwrapping of God's greatest gift is near. Advent---coming. God will decorate our human hearts in hope so that Christians can sit laughing in the rain, knowing that the Lord is going to shine in upon their being. For no matter how long the darkness, God will send the Light. In spite of cursing and violence and the massacring of human dignity, we will dance in the streets of Bethlehem, for He will be born! We will gather in love and wholeness.

The church is Epiphany. We are the Magi, searching, resplendent in this world's accouterments of knowledge and wealth and achievement. But we search for something more, And---of all unlikely places---in a stable the Deity appears. The birthing of our Lord bursts in upon our ordinary lives like fireworks in the snow. Only God would send a little baby King, and we are on our knees, where we are within reach of our full personhood.

The church is Good Friday. Darkness burnt into blackness, abysmal absence of anything good. We acknowledge that death is real and we tremble for a world that would kill its God. Our feet stand in quicksand; our voices echo sterile silence. We huddle together to meet the dark and the death, forgetting what was taught us, forgetting that somewhere a seed is sprouting, somewhere a child is growing. All we see is Christ crucified.

The church is Easter. Out of Death; Life. Out of darkness: a lush green world, flowers in the ice, sunrays in the storm, mustard seeds galore. Our souls enter a spiritual springtime, our bodies given over to leaping and dancing, our very beings saturated in hosannas. Our shouting crashes in upon this world: the Lord lives! We live! Resurrection resounds throughout our community.

The church is Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is poured out upon us and sends us out together aflame with new life, inheritors of the wealth of God; life abundant. We are liberated from the prisons of pettiness, jealousy, and greed, liberated to be the church.

We are freed to free others. We are affirmed to affirm others. We are loved to love others. We are family; we are community. We are the church triumphant---you, me, anyone who would come unto the Lord---renewed, redirected, empowered, to change things and lives, together in love and wholeness.

We are the Lord's church, the church of justice and mercy, the people sent to open prisons, to heal the sick, to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to reconcile, to be Allelulas when there is no music. The mantle is upon our shoulders. Joy is apparent in our living. We have been commissioned to be the church of Jesus Christ (Kneeling in Bethlehem, p. 88-91)

Shortly before his assassination in 1980 Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador wrote: "It helps now and then, to step back and take the long view. The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us. We plant seeds that one day will grow. We lay foundations that will need further development. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning. . . an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builder; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own. Amen."

Prayer. Holy One, untamed by the names I give you, in the silence name me, that I may know who I am, hear the truth you have put into me, trust the love you have for me, which you call me to live out with my sisters and brothers in your human family. Amen. (Ted Loder)