

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church



Weekly Sermon Series

Baptism and Beginnings

Rooted: Baptism and Beginnings



In Christian community, baptism is known as the Sacrament of Belonging. It is a ritual that acts as an initiation. Through baptism, we belong to the community of faith. To be baptized is to belong to something larger than yourself. Before Christianity, baptism was a ritual in Judaism performed by priests. They baptized people who were deemed unclean. This could refer to anyone who touched an unclean person. It also may have involved people who were in contact with the deceased. Being with a woman in menstruation, and a host of other circumstances described in the Torah, could render a person unclean. Baptism was the means by which one could return to good standing in the community.

We know from archeology today that there was a group of devout Jews out in the wilderness around the Dead Sea who had

rejected the city life. They practiced an annual ritual of baptism that was different from other Jewish baptisms. They emphasized the idea that one must be properly pious and repentant in order for the external ritual baptism action to be effective.

John's baptisms were strikingly similar. There was much anxiety in the air, with people wondering what God would do next. How could they prepare for "the wrath to come"? John offered a way to start over in life and in relationship with God. He offered a baptism of repentance. He called everyone in the small towns and cities, the tax collectors and soldiers, those who lived ordinary lives, back to repentance.

As Luke tells us, Jesus was in earnest prayer, with his heart turned to God, when "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'" (Luke 3:21b-22.) Jesus' baptism begins his public ministry as the beloved son of God.

Do you have a story about how your life began in the Christian faith? Did you experience bumps in the road of faith? Maybe you wandered away and returned again and again? What events or influences mark the beginnings of your life as a Christian?

Lord Jesus, with you we die to sin, and rise to new life each day as your baptized believers. Keep us in this faith. Amen.

-- Week of February 28, 2010