

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22  
January 13, 2019 – THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

## Baptism Wonder

☆ for all...for me... (vv.15-17)

☆ for Jesus... (vv.21-22)

Dear children of God through **Baptism**:

What kinds of things make you stop in **Wonder**? The sight of your first child – ten fingers and tiny toes, two little eyes and arms, the realization that you are now responsible for a living human being?

Maybe you've stood with your back to a prairie city like Cheyenne, Wyoming, gazing at the sky ablaze with stars. It was August, 1980. The U-Haul truck was loaded with all my earthly possessions. My childhood lay behind me, Seminary, starting a business, getting married in the spring all lay ahead. And the **Wonder** of it was that God who created and controls this vast universe would care at all about little me. Yet His Son Jesus says, "*The very hairs of your head are all numbered.*" (Luke 12:7 NIV84)

Perhaps the grandeur of the Grand Canyon kept you mesmerized, straining to see the tiny mule train winding the path below. Hiking down is harder than up, as a friend wrote in their Christmas letter, but the last two miles are intense no matter what shape you're in. Wouldn't you stop and **Wonder** if the water line was broken to the lodge? Without running water for showers and toilets, the strangers you came down with will be much closer companions than you thought. Ah, the **Wonder** – not always so pleasant!

☆ for all...for me... (vv.15-17)

*"In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene – during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert."* (Luke 3:1f NIV84) Part of the **Wonder** was that no prophet had been in Israel telling God's people His thoughts for 400 years. No wonder towns for miles around were streaming out to hear that "*voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'*" Isaiah foretold that "*all mankind will see God's salvation.*" (Luke 3:4,6 NIV84)

What remarkable **Wonder** that Dr. Luke was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to record this in his own highly educated style, sharply centered in history of real rulers over real people with families like ours. Ancient Jews took their kids along to religious assemblies, "to church." (Deuteronomy 31:12; Ezra 10:1) So when the Holy Spirit says through Luke, "*All the people were being baptized...*" (v.21 NIV84), the context here and the rest of the Bible includes infants and children. Later on, Jesus would tell His disciples, "*Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matthew 18:3 NIV84) Denying infant baptism is a manifest heresy in the church.

**Wonder** at Jesus' will for all, literally, "*all the ethnic groups,*" to be baptized as He commands in His Great Commission. (Matthew 28:18-20) God's message through John the Baptist was meant for all people. Parents were to teach their children the **Wonder** of warning and the **Wonder** of God's rich grace: "*The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might be the Christ. <sup>16</sup>John answered them all, 'I baptize you with water. But someone mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup>His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor. He will gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'*" (EHV<sup>1</sup>)

<sup>1</sup> Quotes unless marked otherwise: EHV ~ Evangelical Heritage Version, the Wartburg Project. NPH © 2017. 800-662-6022.

John the Baptist was Jesus' forerunner, the last prophet of the Old Testament. He prepared the hearts of the people for God's long-promised Christ. John honestly confessed his personal unworthiness saying of Christ, "**He must increase, but I must decrease.**" As Jesus increases in our minds and hearts through this Word, we **Wonder** all the more at **Baptism for all... and each of us for me....** It diminishes this wonderful blessing when some speak of "water baptism" and "Spirit baptism" as if they are two different things. The Holy Spirit says through the Lord's Apostle Paul, "**There is...one Lord, one faith, one baptism.**" (Ephesians 4:4f) Looking closer here at the Greek original, John more literally speaks of Jesus *baptizing you in the sphere of the Holy Spirit, i.e., in the Holy Spirit's line of work.* By the Gospel in Word and Sacraments the Holy Spirit brings us into God's grace through His Word-powered water. Then He strengthens our faith through the bread and wine / body and blood of Christ's Holy Supper.

Some think that "**He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire**" refers to the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. That fits Scripture too. But here the **unquenchable fire** John shows for the **chaff** burned up in hell, picturing unbelievers as worthless **chaff**, and Christ's **wheat** as believers, gathered into **the barn**, the *keeping place* of God's heaven. God's will: **the Holy Spirit's** grace. Man's rebellious will: **unquenchable fire.** **Wonder** at God's gift **for all...for me...to see Baptism...**

### ☆ for Jesus... (vv.21-22)

**"When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. While he was praying, heaven was opened, <sup>22</sup>and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with you."**

Don't picture the Holy Spirit fluttering aimlessly down on Jesus. He flew more directly, very determined to pour out joy and power on Jesus in His Baptism. And don't miss the heavenly Father's voice. What He says to Jesus is meant for you and me too. Earlier Matthew (3:14f) reports: **John tried to stop [Jesus], saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?" <sup>15</sup>But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, because it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then John let him.** Jesus had no sin of His own because He is the sinless Son of God, the Holy One. But He brings **righteousness** as a free gift to all who put their faith and trust in Him. What emerges is **Baptism Wonder.**

According to God's Word, the Bible, we come to the waters of Baptism filthy with sin. We can't see it or smell it because we're like kids growing up on a dairy farm. It is what it is, and you just don't notice. But take those crusty barn boots and put them into clean water, and it's not clean anymore. No farmer or rancher would be happy with you washing your dirty boots in the horses' water tank. So we would pollute the water of Baptism if all that happened is us coming with our sins. King David, a man **"after [God's] own heart"** (Acts 13:22), confessed to be **"sinful from the time my mother conceived me."** (Psalm 51:5) Since **"all our righteous acts are like filthy rags"** (Isaiah 64:6), we can't help our pollution.

But Jesus enters that water as the Righteous One, totally sinless and purifying everything. He not only sanctifies the Baptism of all who follow in His Church, but He purifies the water by taking all our polluting sin, on Himself. As Isaiah says, **"The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."** (53:6)

Daily reliving **Baptism Wonder**, our sin is drowned in its depths and we come forth to new life in God the Holy Spirit. We are comforted to hear the Father say of us as He said of Jesus, **"This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him."** **Baptism Wonder!** Because of Jesus, God the Father is **well pleased** with you! Now God wants this to be obvious, felt by all in your new life. You see, **"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."** (Galatians 5:22f NIV84) Don't be satisfied with worry and anxiety in your heart or bitterness in your life. Don't let your marriage or your service in the church fall short of **faithfulness.** As one sinner said to Jesus, **"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."** Our Lord replied in your Baptism too, **"I am willing. Be clean!"** (Matthew 8:2f) Ah, dearest Jesus, daily make me fresh and new like you! And let **the**

*fruit of the Spirit* grow abundantly in **Baptism Wonder for all...for me...**– like you! Amen.