

Epiphany 1

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Prayer of the Day

Father in heaven, at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan you proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized into Christ faithful in their calling to be your children and inheritors with him of everlasting life; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Genesis 1:1-5

{1} In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, {2} the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. {3} Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. {4} And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. {5} God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

2. *the earth was a formless void*: The point is not that God fabricated the ordered creation out of an empty chaos, but that in contrast to that which is empty, creation is teeming with life, and in contrast to chaos, it is regular and ordered. Change and the strange were remnants of the formless void and to be approached with caution viewed with and awe.

a wind from God: ruah elohim. *ruah* is properly wind. It was also the word used of the spirit. The traditional translation "Spirit of God" reflects the theological development. In John 3:8 shows a similar play on words in Greek, *pneuma* = wind, spirit. In this verse the translation should show the use of the word *elohim*, "god," as an adjective meaning "strong," "violent," "great," "mighty," therefore "a strong wind." This strong wind blows over the waters and arranges them in order.

3. *Let there be light*: It is noteworthy that light, the first act of creation, precedes the sources of light, the sun and the stars.

4. *God separated the light from the darkness*: Darkness is not a part of the creation, but a residuum of that which covered the deep before creation. Darkness and night were uncanny and potentially dangerous.

5. *there was evening and there was morning, the first day*: For Israel the day began with the evening, later standardized at 6:00 p.m., and ran for 24 hours.

Psalms 29

{1} Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. {2} Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name; worship the LORD in holy splendor. {3} The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over mighty waters. {4} The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. {5} The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon. {6} He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. {7} The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire. {8} The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. {9} The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all say, "Glory!" {10} The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever. {11} May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!

"...from the very beginning we will have to consider the probability that a Canaanite Baal hymn with its description of a theophany was handed down without radical revision on the part of the OT tradents in Israel...." [1]

1. *heavenly beings*: In Hebrew, *bene elim*, "sons of God." In other near eastern religions these would have been subordinate gods who were literally descendants of the supreme god. In Israel, "sons of God" is a metaphor for those beings created by Yahweh who had the authority to act in his name. The Davidic king, likewise, had such a designation and such authority on earth (Psalm 2:7).

2. *the glory of his name*: Yahweh's name is his identity, and by glorifying his name, Yahweh, himself, is glorified.

3-5. *the voice of the Lord*: The voice is "thunder, the booming word of power." [2] This image is used for Yahweh's voice in other theophanies as well (Exodus 19:19).

6-9: The image is of a raging thunder storm, with lightning and wind and thunder that shakes the earth. In such a storm one could see the power of the formless, dark, watery void that preceded creation, over which a strong wind blew.

temple: The Hebrew word, *hekhal*, means both temple and palace, as well as the Holy Place in the Jerusalem Temple. "Since a temple is often considered a god's dwelling place, the distinction between palace and temple is only minor. In the OT, the *hekhal* in the sense of 'temple' refers to the temple of Yahweh.... Several temples are referred to as the temple of Yahweh: the temple at Shiloh (1 S. 1:9; 3:3), the temple of Solomon (2 K. 18:16; 23:4; 24:13; Jer. 7:4; 24:1), and the temple of Zerubbabel (Ezr. 3:10; Hab. 2:18). [3]

10. *The Lord sits enthroned over the flood*: The "flood" is a metaphor for the waters of the pre-creation dis-order, the chaos with constantly threatens the creation. Yahweh is victorious over it, and guards his people.

11: The final verse prays for Yahweh's gift of strength and peace, "the fullness of his power as the God of Heaven" [4] to his people.

Acts 19:1-7

{1} While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. {2} He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." {3} Then he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." {4} Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." {5} On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. {6} When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied-- {7} altogether there were about twelve of them.

1. *Apollos*: Apollos was a disciple from Alexandria who taught accurately the things of Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He was further instructed by Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, though he was not re-baptized. He went to Corinth to work in the Christian community there. There were some in Corinth who identified themselves as belonging to Apollos (1 Corinthians 1:12).

the interior regions and came to Ephesus: Paul was still in Asia Minor. After Apollos had gone to Corinth, Paul arrived in Ephesus.

some disciples: These disciples had also received the baptism of John. After instruction they were re-baptized (by Paul?).

5. *they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*: Baptism in the name of Jesus seems to have been the customary form (Acts 2:38; 10:48). Jesus' command to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit at the end of the Gospel of Matthew may reflect a more developed liturgical practice in the 70's or 80's when the Gospel was written.

6. *Paul laid his hands on them*: The transmission of the gift of the Holy Spirit and the charisms that accompany that gift sometimes, but not always, follow the laying of hands by

an apostle on the converts. The Samaritans were baptized in the name of Jesus but didn't receive the Holy Spirit until Peter and John laid their hands on them (Acts 8:16-17). On the other hand, when Peter preached to Cornelius and his family in Caesarea the Holy Spirit fell on them, and *then* Peter baptized them (Acts 10:31-48).

the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied: "Tongues...are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers" (1 Corinthians 14:22).

7: there were about twelve of them: "The number has no hidden or symbolic meaning." [5]

The point of the reading is that the baptism of Jesus is superior to that of John. Baptism in the name of Jesus conveys the Holy Spirit which expresses itself in the gifts of speaking in tongues and prophecy (Acts 10:16). The blessings God bestows have that dual quality. They are not possessions to be hoarded but gifts to be shared. Each baptized person is by definition a witness to Christ. Baptism is as much for the sake of unbelievers and it is for the sake of believers.

Mark 1:4-11

{4} John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. *{5}* And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. *{6}* Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. *{7}* He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. *{8}* I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." *{9}* In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. *{10}* And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. *{11}* And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

See the notes on the Gospel for The Second Sunday in Advent.

4. the wilderness: The wilderness, like the void in Genesis, is a place of unordered potential. Yahweh brought order to the primeval chaos, and created the heavens and the earth. Yahweh led Israel through the wilderness into the promised land. While both were unpredictable and dangerous, both were places where God ruled for the well-being of his people. John has withdrawn from the order of his world to the wilderness where God alone can bring order out of disorder, hope out of despair, righteousness out of sin.

6. a leather belt around his waist: 2 Kings 1:8.

8. Holy Spirit: Literally, "holy wind." Like the *ruah* in Genesis, which blew over the waters and brought order to the formless void.

10. he saw the heavens torn apart: Jesus alone saw this. The rending of the heavens marks the entrance of God into the human sphere.

11. You are my Son, the Beloved: The words are addressed to Jesus and heard by him alone. "Socially and psychologically, all family members were embedded in the family unit. Modern individualism simply did not exist." [6] Jesus changes families. His identity is bound up with God, not with Joseph and Mary. His honor is now that of the God of Israel. In the Gospel of Mark his identity is confirmed by unclean spirits (2:24; 3:11; and by a Roman soldier (15:39). God's ascription of sonship and favor anticipate these later recognitions. The Gospel of Mark ends without an acknowledgement of his honor by his disciples. But those who read know who Jesus is. In Jesus' words, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen" (Mark 4:9).

Reflection

The God who created order as an alternative to dis-order, the God who blesses his people with peace, the God who sends his Holy Spirit upon those who serve him and makes

them his children, called Jesus, "my Son, the Beloved." Whatever that means, and it means more than we can possibly imagine, we who call ourselves Christians are witnesses to his "glory as of the only son of the Father." We have become "children of God."

While the gospels of Mark and John are very different in many ways, in this they agree: Jesus and the Father are intimately connected. Son of God or Word of God, there is finally no difference, Jesus and the Father are one.

We can not know this apart from revelation. Nor can anyone else know it except through the revelation that has been given. We can not demonstrate it logically. We can not establish it historically. We do not have evidence to prove it. If I am honest, even though I accept the reality of revelation, I must admit that I still have difficulty grasping the nature of the reality which it declares. Yet, we "ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;" we "worship the LORD in holy splendor."

Hymns [7]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

87 --E--Hail to the	799v --I--When Long Before
36 --D--On Jordan's Banks	Time
507 --I--How Firm a	194 --II--All Who Believe
682v --I--Praise the Spirit	647v --G--When Jesus Came
(751s)	85, 195, 188, 475, 88, 90
757v --I--Creating God, Your	767v/827s, 794v, 688v

Prayers of the People [8]

A: Sinless Jesus did not need a baptism of repentance but welcomed it for our sake. We, however, cannot live without his Spirit given in our baptism. We are moved to say, "Lord of every blessing," and add this response, C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For the church, that our bishops may have wisdom to shepherd faithfully pastors and congregations. Lord of every blessing. C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For all nations, developed and developing, that irrational desire for armaments may not rob the citizenry of basic needs. Lord of every blessing. C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For those addicted to drugs or whatever diminishes fullness of life, break the crippling hold and restore a sense of general well-being. Lord of every blessing. C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For those in the healing arts, that they may be imbued with constancy, compassion, patience, great skill, stamina, and sound mind. Lord of every blessing. C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For those receiving baptism into Christ, grant growth in faith and true discipleship. Lord of every blessing. C: Hear us, we pray.

P: We are given to know, O God, that what you have begun in Christ, you will bring to perfection. C: Amen.

Or [9]

Presider or deacon

As we celebrate the baptism of Christ, let us offer prayers to God who calls us to pass from death to life.

Deacon or other leader

By the baptism of the Son of God in the river Jordan.

For *N* our bishop and the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For *NN* our catechumen(s) and for their families and sponsors.

For all who seek Christ, and for the conversion of the whole human race.

For mercy, peace, and justice throughout the world.

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, the hungry and the oppressed, and those in prison.

For the dying and the dead.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Remembering the blessed Virgin Mary, *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

Holy One of Israel, who breathed across the waters of creation, accept the prayers we offer on this joyful feast, lead us by your Spirit through water and blood, and quench our thirst at the table of your Son. Glory to you for ever.

Notes

[1] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, p. 346

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 348.

[3] M. Ottoson, "hekhal," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (ed. by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren). Vol. III. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978, p. 383.

[4] Kraus, *ibid.*, p. 351

[5] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1998, p. 644.

[6] Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 179.

[7] <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0203.txt>

[8] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_b1.txt

[9] <http://members.home.com/oplater/prayer.htm>