

Sermon Notes – January 12, 2025
The Holy Gospel of St. Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22
Peace Lutheran Church
“The Identity of the Messiah”

The story of Jesus' baptism is permeated with the triune God. Many liturgical language scholars see it in the narrative of Jesus' baptism itself, as the believing Church looks at Christ and, in doing so, encounters the Trinity - the man at the river, the descending dove, and the voice from heaven. This same Trinity can be found as Isaiah asserts that “God will be with us,” “when we pass through the waters” (think Exodus) and “when we walk through the fire” (think Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace).

The imagery in Luke is replete with water, fire, and Spirit. John baptizes with water and likewise announces baptism by Jesus with the Holy Spirit and fire. The one who is recognized as the beloved Son will “gather the wheat into his granary and burn the chaff” (3: 17). The Spirit descends as a dove. With the triune God imaged everywhere on this day, what baptism comes to mean is akin to Jesus' own baptism: we become God's beloved children.

Furthermore, in Isaiah the Lord will accompany the people through all the strife of lives ripped apart by violence and displacement. Speaking to people in exile, giving hope for return to home and community, Isaiah asserts the tight relationship between creator and people. If we ask why God carries out the promise to reunite the people “from the end of the earth” (43: 6), God answers, “Everyone who is called by My name ...I created for my glory” (v. 7). This is an image of bringing together, ending division, bridging differences, with a welcome into a life that is beloved. We are embraced by the God who sees the baptism as precious!

Notice that in the epistle reading today from Acts, Peter and John visit the people of Samaria when called to come to them because the people had received the Spirit (Acts 8: 14-16). The words for baptism used now for centuries are, “I baptize you in the name of the

Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” There is more going on in the use of this language than may be immediately apparent. Other words have been posited for this “name” - including Love, Beloved, Lover (Augustine); Root, Fruit, Shoot (Tertullian); Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier; Maker, Lover, and Keeper (as offered by Julian of Norwich); and Truth, Wisdom, and Love-but NONE carry the integral relationship of family that is present in the most common baptismal words.