



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Baptism of our Lord (C) – Acts 8:14-17

Focus: *The Gift of the Holy Spirit in Baptism*

word of life

“Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 8:17 NRSV)

Read Acts 8:14 -17

The book in the Bible called The Acts of the Apostles is true to its name. This book is full of compelling stories of the early church struggling to discover its mission without the physical presence of Jesus. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the apostles provide leadership and guidance to the early church.

Chapter 8 begins with Saul’s approval of the killing of Stephen and the persecution of Christians, including throwing both men and women into prison. Despite the persecution, followers of Jesus continue to preach, heal, baptize, and encourage the early church to continue to grow.

Philip is one of many who preaches the good news of Jesus Christ, taking the gospel message to Samaria. For centuries, there has been tension and division among the Jews from the north (Samaria) and the south (Judah). Jews from the north were considered by many to be religiously impure and inferior. When Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, he chose a Samaritan as one perceived to be the least likely to stop and help the wounded traveler. No one would expect a Samaritan to be compassionate and helpful.

1. *What else do you know about Samaritans?*
2. *Is the good news of Jesus intended to be proclaimed to the Samaritans? Explain your answer.*

The crowds in Samaria respond positively to the signs performed by Phillip. They not only believe Philip, but they want to be baptized by him. Even a well-known magician named Simon is amazed at Philip and is baptized, following Philip as his constant companion.

All seems to be going well with Philip’s work in Samaria, except there is one major problem. The Holy Spirit has not come to the newly-converted in their baptism. (See Acts 8:16.)

3. *Have you ever experienced the Holy Spirit not coming as expected? If so, what was the situation?*
4. *How might you explain the Holy Spirit not coming to the Samaritans in baptism?*
5. *Can the Holy Spirit come to a person who doesn’t desire the Spirit?*

In response to the news of the Samaritans accepting the word of God, the apostles in Jerusalem send Peter and John to be with them and to pray for the Holy Spirit. “Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 8:17 NRSV)

It is unclear as to the reasons why the Holy Spirit does not come to the newly baptized. It might be a reflection of the popularity of magic and the strength of other belief systems at work in Samaria. Perhaps it is a reflection of Philip’s limited understanding about baptism or the protocol of using the apostles. It is clear, as the new mission field is begun in Samaria, the apostles are mobilized and effective. This story is a reminder of the tremendous, undeserved gift of the Holy Spirit given in baptism—not to be taken for granted.

Word among us

For a long time, Simon has amazed people with his magic. (Acts 8:9-13) But Simon himself becomes amazed by Philip and his ministry in Samaria. Thus, when Peter and John come to town in order to pray and baptize with the Holy Spirit, Simon knows he is witnessing something extraordinary. As a popular magician, Simon recognizes power when he sees it. (Read Acts 8:18-25)

Simon offers to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit from Peter and John. (Acts 8:18) He envisions all that could be done when the Holy Spirit's power is mixed with his own magic tricks. But Peter will have nothing to do with this proposal and confronts Simon directly. (See Acts 8:20-23.) Peter is clear: the Holy Spirit is not for sale.

1. *Describe how you envision Simon the magician.*
2. *Who are modern-day magicians?*
3. *How do people today try to control or manipulate the Holy Spirit?*

In some ways, Simon the magician is similar to Simon, the disciple of Jesus who was re-named Peter. Both men understood the gospel message, but not totally. Both had difficulty applying the teachings of Jesus into daily life. Both were enthusiastic and passionate, but both also had a tendency to put their foot in their mouths. Both needed others for clarity and guidance.

4. *Can you relate to Simon the magician and Simon Peter? How so?*
5. *When in your life have you needed another Christian to clarify and guide?*

If Peter is empathetic to Simon's misunderstanding, he does not show it. Instead, Peter reprimands him sternly for trying to manipulate the Holy Spirit. Peter offers Simon tough love, but also teaches him about repentance, prayer, and forgiveness. Simon is moved by Peter's words and responds with fear, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me." (Acts.8:24 NRSV)

faith practice in daily life

Live among God's faithful people

It is unclear why the Holy Spirit does not come to those whom Philip baptized, but does come when Peter and John laid hands upon the people of Samaria. It can be a bit unsettling for us to hear this story, but we can be thankful for the "Peters and Johns" who go to where they are sent.

If nothing else, this passage reminds us of the gift of the Holy Spirit given in baptism. It is not a gift to be assumed or neglected. As we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord, let us also recognize and acknowledge the gift of the Holy Spirit given to us in our own baptism.

6. *What does it mean for you to have received the gift of Holy Spirit in your baptism?*
7. *What questions do you have about baptism?*
8. *Who are the "Peters and Johns" in your community to consult?*
9. *How might we thank and support those apostles among us who are still being sent to proclaim the gospel?*

Prayer

Open us to accept your word, to receive the gift of Baptism, to grow in our faith, and to pray with others who are seeking to be baptized. Amen

last word

Pause to ponder the significance of your baptism.

Daily Faith Practices

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