

# **“BAPTISM IS DANGEROUS!!”**

Epiphany 1 B/The Baptism of our Lord  
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Peace Lutheran  
Grass Valley, CA

## Weekly Funny:

A preacher, newly called to a small country town, needed to mail a letter. Passing a young boy on the street, the pastor asked where he could find the post office. After getting his answer, the minister thanked the boy and said, “If you’ll come to church this evening, you can hear me tell everyone how to get to heaven.” “I don’t know, sir,” the boy replied. “You don’t even know how to get to the post office!”

## Teaching Points:

1. A Congregational Council meeting.
2. The thread of “the power of the Holy Spirit” is in all our readings today.
3. Our baptism is not an event, but a life, an ongoing living under God’s power.
4. Andrew Young story—baptism is dangerous.
5. With the Spirit, powerful things are afoot—and that’s dangerous, not for God, but for our way of thinking.

## Message:

It was the monthly Congregational Council meeting. The pastor was leading devotions. She had picked the Baptism of Jesus as her scripture and from it was speaking about how God, through the Holy Spirit, releases power. She pointed out that after Jesus was baptized, the heavens were RIPPED or TORN open. From the heavens God’s Spirit came to proclaim a certain blessing to Jesus. She went on to speak about how Jesus served God and by the power of the Holy Spirit accomplished the most wonderful thing: salvation for all humankind.

This Pastor then went on to suggest that her council, and God’s people, should be open to the power of the Holy Spirit. She mentioned that this power is what enables God’s people to accomplish greater things than what God’s people can do alone. At this point, one of the council people, in a stage whisper, said, “It is at this point that I always start to panic.”

Uncomfortable. Threatened. Panicked. Even scared. We should be uncomfortable when it comes to baptism. We should be panicking when we really think about the power that is released by the Almighty when His Spirit comes to action in our lives. We should be even more scared when God drops down on us with the Holy Spirit.

The power released in the Spirit of God is a theme through today’s readings.

In Genesis it has to do with how God releases his word and spirit to cause creation out of chaos. It has to do with the power of the Spirit that brings order out of total chaotic disorder.

The book of Acts tells of a point in time when Paul comes to Ephesus. There is some feeling that there was not power released in Baptism. Paul seeks to know the source of the Baptism. When he discovers that it has not been in the Name of Jesus, he understands why there is no power. He then baptizes in Jesus name and things happen. Dramatic stuff starts. Things get into action.

At the Baptism of Jesus at the River Jordan, God's spirit is released — and things happen. The heavens are ripped apart and God's spirit comes down. God speaks. Now things start to happen -- people are healed, people are raised from the dead, and sinners repent and sins are forgiven. Eventually, the most dramatic of all -- Jesus rises from the dead signaling the beginning of a new age - - an age in which death has not the last word.

Does that make you panic?? Does that all raise up feelings of insecurity?? Maybe it should!! Think about it!! What kind of power has to be released to create order out of the chaos? What kind of power has to be released to begin to change lives and conquer death? It has to be dramatic. For just think of the power it takes to bring order out of the chaos of three kids with cabin fever and three days inside without school? What kind of power does it take to create even a little order in the chaos of the work place? Or in the after effects of a storm? Or even the daily trials we face?

But, the thread is pretty clear. When God releases His Spirit things happen. When, in the waters of Baptism we are united with Jesus, things have to happen. The Spirit of God is to be released in our lives so that we begin to share in the power of God, the ministry of Jesus, the blessings of the Gospel.

Our culture has a tendency to be an "event culture". We move from event to event—birthday to anniversary, Christmas to Easter, New Years Day to Memorial Day to Labor day.

Special events are important. They can mark special times for us. They can help us link the past to the future. They can solidify our memories and focus our thoughts. But the events that mark our life are not the same as life.

We tend to make Baptism an event. A one-time something in our lives. However, Baptism is life. It is not "I was baptized" but "I am baptized". "I am crucified in Christ so that I no longer live, but Christ lives through me", (Paul). You see our Baptism is life. In life, the power of the Spirit is released — "you are marked with the sign of the cross and sealed with the Holy Spirit forever" — those are the words that were said at YOUR baptism. The heavens opened and God poured our God's power for your life.

But do you live it? Does it keep you on your toes? Does it “scare” you, even just a little bit? If not, it should!! Baptism is dangerous.

You see, baptism isn't some cute-little-baby-warm-fuzzy-isn't-this-a-nice-family picture kind of feeling. Baptism is the most dangerous thing we do. Baptism is the most radical and threatening thing we do. Because, if we do it seriously, it gives God a place to release awesome power — awesome life changing, life giving power.

You'll recall the name Andrew Young. He is an ordained UCC minister and was an ambassador of the United States.

He once said, as he considered how his eldest daughter had become active in her local church, how pleased he was. With each deepening level of her involvement he became more and more proud. But one day she announced that she was going to join the ministry of Habitat for Humanity to build homes for the poor of Uganda. This was not too many years after the fall of Idi Amin, and Uganda was still a very violent country.

"Andrew Young confessed, 'I tried to talk her out of it. I mean, I wanted her to go to church, to find a nice Christian man to marry, to develop a relationship with God and settle down. But, believe me, I didn't have anything like this in mind. I didn't intend for her to go so far with it. I mean--Uganda! But she said she felt called. What could I say?'" (Martin B. Copenhaver, "It Can Be Dangerous," Pulpit Digest, Jan./Feb. 1995, p. 9)

Today, in our readings, we see something significant and powerful in the way God comes in Jesus to work among us. We see something significant in the kind of power that is released when the Spirit of God comes to dwell on us!!

For Mark, the defining beginning in Jesus' ministry was not his birth, but his baptism. It was in His Baptism that the power of God was released in the Holy Spirit so that things could happen--Good news could be proclaimed; Salvation could be won; our redemption brought forth.

The defining moment in our lives is when we find Jesus in our lives, identifying with us, picking up our sin, and releasing to us God's Spirit. The defining moment in our ministries, in our faith development, in our confidence in God, is when the Spirit of God begins to move through the chaos of life and ordering our ways. The defining moment is when Jesus comes with the Spirit of God to pick up our brokenness of sin, our sickness unto death, and make us his beloved and saved children.

The scripture tells us, when the Spirit of God is let loose, things happen. And if it weren't for our sense that God is at work with us for us, and in us, at this point we'd all start to panic! Amen.