

Baptism of Our Lord Sunday (Grow Up! / Wake Up!)

Texts: Isaiah 43:1-7
Acts 8:14-17 (Series C, The Baptism of Our Lord) Ps. 29
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Let us pray:

In Dr. Armand Nicholi, Jr.'s, book entitled: *The Question of God*, C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud debated God, Love, and the Meaning of Life. Dr. Nicholi is a psychiatrist who has taught at the Harvard Medical School for many years.

One of his most popular courses has been the one in which he brought the worldviews of *Sigmund Freud* and *C.S. Lewis* into dialogue and debate. Freud's worldview, or understanding of reality, he calls "**materialistic**" or "**scientific**" and Lewis' is called "**religious**" or "**spiritual**". O what the difference these worldviews make.

At the beginning of his chapter entitled, "*Is There an Intelligence Beyond the Universe?*" Freud, the father of modern psychoanalysis, asked the question, "*Is there Someone beyond the universe who created it?*" He answered with a resounding "**No!**"

"The very idea of '**an idealized Superman**' in the sky—to use Freud's phrase—is 'so deliberately infantile and so foreign to reality, and that ... it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never rise above this view of life.'

Freud predicted, however, that as the masses of people become more educated, they would '*turn away*' from '*the fairy tales of religion.*' Freud reminds us that 'the world is no **nursery**' and strongly advises us to face the harsh reality that we are alone in the universe. In short, he shouts, '**Grow up!**'

In contrast, even though C.S. Lewis, in his earlier years, embraced Freud's worldview, he finally became a Christian believer. To the question, "*Is There an Intelligence Beyond the Universe?*" he gave a resounding answer of "**Yes**".

“In short, Lewis shouts, ‘*Wake up!*’ to the ‘signposts’ like the ‘starry heaven above and the moral law within.’ Lewis advises us to open our eyes, to look around, and understand what we see. ***Wake up!***”

During my first year in Bible Collage a group of us hiked to the base of Mount Robson in the Canadian Rockies. We hiked about 16 kilometres up, and at night I noticed the stars were bigger in size. It was so amazing and wonderful that we sung the doxology together.

Every one on the hiking trip was passing on the word about this incredible moment. It was as if we were calling out, “*wake up*” to the signpost of God’s awesome presence and power.

Modern science and technology have made some wonderful discoveries. We celebrate these discoveries. We have all benefited from them. I am convinced that a person with a religious worldview may be a productive scientist, observer, describer, and explainer of the natural phenomena of human life in this beautiful and mysterious cosmos.

Psalm 19 says: ‘*The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*’ To me it is quite obvious, to understand the nature of reality is see that this cosmos is filled with pointers to God.

So today, if we are to **see** and to **hear** the presence and the power of God, we must put on our eye-glasses that open for us the reality of the God in whom we live and move and have our very being.

What are these glasses that allow us to see the *height*, the *depth*, and the *length* of spiritual reality? Our answer: *the Scriptures, the window, the glasses*, that allow us to live in this very real material world, beautiful and mysterious beyond human imagination, and to live within it as those who are “awake” to the fullness of the eternal now. By viewing our world by means of the Word of God illumined by the Holy Spirit we see reality.

Our scripture this morning invites us to see the drama of Jesus' baptism and in our seeing to be in awe at the presence and power of God in our own life experience. Luke tells us that Jesus' baptism occurred after John had baptized all the other people. Then Jesus stepped down into the waters and John baptized him. For a while they stood in the waters, waited, and prayed. Suddenly and perhaps almost simultaneously three things happened.

I. First, heaven was opened.

Mark says that "Jesus saw the heavens torn apart." Literally, heaven was opened in a moment of revelation in answer to the prayers of God's people. Isaiah had articulated this prayer: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him." 64:1-4

The good news of our baptism into Jesus Christ is that the heavens are opened and we are invited to see, to hear the presence and experience power of God of the heavens. How does this occur? In our cosmology the heavens are opened in every moment we become aware of the God in whom we live and move and have our very being.

In the deepest sense, when we were baptized, the heavens were opened in a moment of revelation and we were welcomed into a new relationship with God. In that relationship it has been revealed that we are accepted just as we are, forgiven of our sins, declared to be righteous in Jesus Christ, and called into the fullness of eternal life.

II. Secondly, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove.

From the beginning of the biblical story the presence of the Holy Spirit was central. The Spirit or wind of God hovered over the face of the deep on the first day of creation. God breathed God's Spirit into the man's nostrils and he became a living being. The Spirit was recognized as the source of all life. It was the Spirit, breathe of God, that caused the valley of dry bones to live again.

Jesus was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by means of the Holy Spirit overshadowing her. From the beginning then, Jesus' life was the life of the Creator God. Now, in his baptism at the Jordan River, he is anointed with the power of God for his mission.

Paul taught the believers at Corinth that their baptismal confession, that "Jesus is Lord" could only be inspired by the Spirit. "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." **1 Cor. 12:12-13**

Therefore, in reality for us Christians in a world view that is profoundly spiritual. We cannot understand the world around us without the *faith awareness of the Spirit of God*. The Holy Spirit is the presence of Jesus Christ within us each.

His Spirit is the Spirit that abides in us, that gives to us a new mind, that empowers us to think, to feel, and to act like Christ. Therefore, in our baptism we received the promised Holy Spirit and the seal of our belonging to God in life and in death.

I personally don't think that these two world views are in conflict with one another, the Bible doesn't condemn science. Rather it is human pride, and application of these truths that is the problem. Albert Einstein says: **Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.** "*Science, Philosophy and Religion: a Symposium*", 1941

Dr. Sigmund Freud challenged the human race to “grow up”, to accept the fact that there is no God, that we are alone, that we are basically biological creatures who have come into existence by accident. What this means is that we are biologically determined and that there is no power higher than ourselves.

Dr. C.S. Lewis came to believe that this world view was not adequate to explain reality. God in Christ, he said, had come in the power of the Holy Spirit with the desire to live in each of *our hearts*, *to transform us*, and *to conform us* to the image of Christ. To grow up means then to *wake up to this God-bathed world and spiritual environment*. The fullness of humanity depends upon it.

III. Thirdly, a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” This was the Father’s voice, speaking through the opened heavens, and declaring the Father’s pleasure in, and love for, the Servant/Son of God.

How beautifully Luke reveals to us the One triune God, the Holy One of Israel, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At our baptism we receive the revelation that within the very being of God there is a fellowship of delight and love.

And we are welcomed into this fellowship here and now. Baptism is not some kind of a *hell insurance policy* or does it make us *Christians without expressing faith in Jesus Christ*. In the baptism of Jesus, we behold the humility of God. This is the God who has come to share our humanity, to walk in *our shoes*, to share *our burdens*, and to adopt all who believe into his family.

The story of Jesus’ baptism opens the heavens for each and everyone of us. Spiritual reality claims us and fills us. We discover who we are in the reality of God’ love. It is not easy to hold on to this spiritual world view in a *scientific, post-modern* world that teaches us from early childhood that we are creatures of *chance* and that we are *alone* in this cosmos, that the world is *no nursery*, and that we had better “*grow up*”.

No doubt, there is hostility between these two conflicting worldviews. Even though Jesus lived in a pre-scientific world, his words and deeds brought him into conflict with those who thought they were in control of the world. They arrested and crucified him.

This morning we do well to let this text speak and work its reality into our lives anew. Frequently, I am invited to return over and over to the text in John 10 (*I am the good shepherd*) and Luke 3 (*a voice calling to prepare the way*) and remain in times of temptation, doubt, conflict, and discouragement.

As I view my life through the lens of Jesus' baptism, I see anew that the heavens are opened; the Spirit has been given; I have been baptized. I belong to the Lord in life and in death; I am God's beloved child, adopted into God's family. How about you? May it be so for you! **Amen.**

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