

Sermon – January 9, 2022  
“Rise and anoint him for this is the one”  
The Rev. John C. Wright

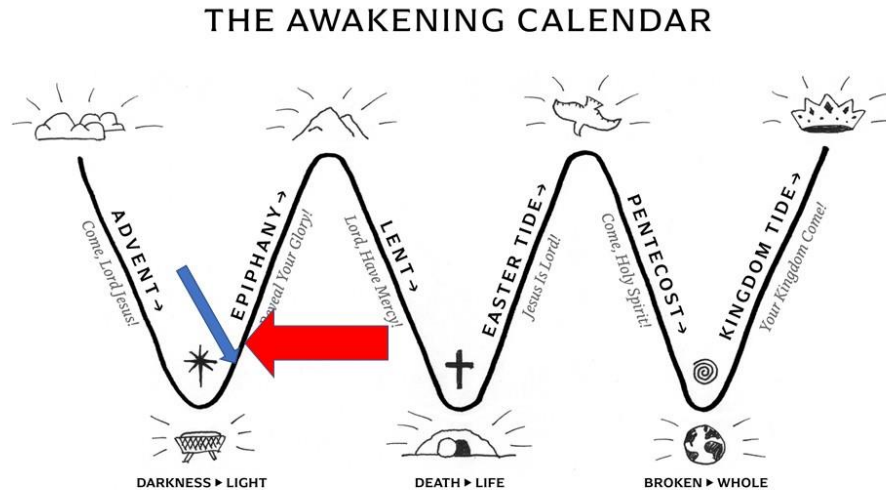


*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill, and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor on this mission field. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day.  
Amen*

Good morning. Happy New Year! How are those spiritual resolutions going? Anyone have any love-provoking moments they would like to share? I do want to share with you that on Thursday evening I turned in my Provisional Elder papers and application items. I received a lot of provoking to love as I worked on those papers over the last couple of months, love from elders who took time to read and comment on my papers and those who sent words of encouragement, and help from a very special proofreader whom God has placed in my life. Thanks to everyone for your support, prayers, love, and patience as those 50+ pages of answers to questions about God and living one's faith were completed. And even if I am not granted an interview, I learned some very key things from the interaction with my reviewers. I have been reminded of texts from seminary readings I needed to see again. I have been humbled by people's willingness to help, guide, and support me this far in my journey as a pastor, and I give thanks for all of you who have let me learn and grow here in paradise over the last 4.5 years.

Okay, does anyone know what time it is? It is XX:XX January 9<sup>th</sup>, in the year 2022 and it is the day on the Christian calendar when we mark the baptism of Jesus. Let's take a look at

the Christian calendar and let me show us what time it is there. The blue arrow marks the visit of



the wise men and the red arrow marks today, the baptism of Jesus. We have turned the corner from Advent and now are headed up the Mount of Transfiguration, a place we will arrive on February 27th. A lot of time has passed between these two arrows. Jesus was two years old when the wise men came to Bethlehem, and at his baptism, we think Jesus was in his early 30's.

Let me give a bit of background to help us understand where we are in the context of scripture. John has appeared in the wilderness and has been baptizing people for repentance from their sins. People have responded, coming out into the wilderness to be baptized in the waters of the Jordan River. These people are wondering if John could be the coming one. John's response to their questioning has been that he is not worthy even to untie the sandals of the one they are expecting. Instead, John has also told them how they will recognize the coming one. John uses images familiar to them from each fall's wheat harvest, the imagery of separating the wheat from the chaff. John tells the people, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." The one they are searching for will not baptize with water, but with the Holy Spirit. The Messiah will burn up the useless, those who do not believe in him, but will gather those who believe in him into his storehouse for keeping.

It is to the place of baptism in the wilderness that Jesus has come to the waters and has been baptized by John. In Luke's version of Jesus' baptism, all of the people who respond to John have been baptized, and among them is Jesus. As we think about Jesus being baptized, we might ask ourselves, "Why is Jesus coming to be baptized? Does Jesus have sins to repent of?" No! Then why does Jesus come to John for baptism? Jesus comes to the waters to be baptized to join with the people who have responded to John's call and been baptized. Jesus, by being baptized, will establish a connection between John's ministry of repentance and his own. Jesus is also establishing a connection to water baptism. We should recall other moments when something new has come from water. Creation coming from the formless waters in the beginning and the people of Israel coming out of the waters of the Red Sea to be a new creation, people of God, are a few memories we might recall. Jesus' coming up out of the waters of baptism points us to a new creation that is coming through him.

At some point following baptism, Jesus is separated from others and is in prayer. There is no indication in Luke's gospel that others are present. Don't miss in your Bibles what happens while Jesus is praying: heaven is opened. This is Bible "speak," for God is about to speak directly. It is a moment when something key is happening in the history of humanity and in the midst of God's plan for redeeming God's people. It is a moment when God speaks directly; it is an underline moment in our Bibles. Also, don't miss that Jesus is praying when this occurs. We, as those who are seeking to grow into Jesus' image, should also fill our lives with prayer. Heaven opens and then two things happen: the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus in bodily form, like a dove, and a voice from heaven speaks, saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." We should ask ourselves, "What is going on here?" I have wondered about these events every time I have read this scripture. Jesus' baptism is an event that is found in some form in all of the gospels, a mark that Jesus' baptism is very important. I will give Sandra Richter credit for pulling together a number of events in the Bible that I knew about, but had never made the connections between until she guided our Bible study at Fairfields UMC through the idea of covenants. As she has "cleaned up our closets" in our study of the Old Testament, she has also connected events in the Old Testament to this moment in the New Testament.

For us to make this connection and understand what happens when heaven opened, we need to journey back to the Old Testament for just a few minutes. Let's go first to Israel's first king chosen by God. Let me read from 1 Samuel 10:1. This occurs during Samuel the prophet's

first meeting with Saul. “Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on his head, and kissed him; he said, ‘The LORD has anointed you ruler over His people Israel. You shall reign over the people of the LORD and you will save them from the hand of their enemies all around.’” And then to make this complete, just a few verses later in verse 23, when the people of Israel have gathered to select a king, we find these words. “When he [Saul] took his stand among the people, he was head and shoulders taller than any of them. Samuel said to all the people, ‘Do you see the one whom the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people.’ And all the people shouted, ‘Long live the king!’” We should notice at this event that there is a prophet of God, oil for anointing, and the confirmation of the people declaring Saul their king.

Now we move forward to King David and 1 Samuel 16:11-13, “Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Are all your sons here?’ And he said, ‘There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.’ And Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.’ He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, ‘Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.’ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward.” Now it will take a lot of battles with those aligned with the family of Saul before Israel is unified under David and we hear the people confirm David as their king. Again, we should notice that God has selected the king by sending a prophet to anoint with oil and then the people confirm him as their king.

Then one last time, this time with Solomon, a king selected not by the oldest living son’s position in the birth order, but designated by David as God’s selection for king over God’s people. Listen to these words from 2 Kings 1:38-39: “So the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, went down and had Solomon ride on King David’s mule, and led him to Gihon. There the priest Zadok took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, ‘Long live King Solomon!’” Did you catch all of those parts? We have a prophet speaking for God, a priest representing God, oil of anointing poured onto the head of Solomon, and words of confirmation for God’s chosen king over His people, Israel

Now with that background, let’s go back and look at what happens with Jesus. He has come up from the water from his baptism, connecting to the repentance of John’s ministry. We see a sign of new birth coming up from the water of baptism, so we have a prophet of God

present. Then God opens heaven and anoints Jesus with the Holy Spirit. We have a visual dove descending on Jesus. This anointing is our connection to the oil of anointing for God's kings. And then God speaks and confirms that Jesus is "God's Son, the Beloved, with whom God is well pleased." These are the words of confirmation, not from the people, but from God. All the elements of the anointing of a king, the Messiah, the anointed one who is to come, are present, John is the prophet, the Holy Spirit is the anointing of Jesus, and God's own voice confirms Jesus as the one to lead God's people back to him.

Now we know the rest of this story, the story that will play out on the Christian calendar between now and Easter Sunday. Jesus will be crucified, die, be placed in the tomb, resurrected, and ascend to heaven to sit at the Father's right hand. As grace is extended to us and we come into a relationship with Jesus, as the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, we realize our need for a savior and we are given grace to respond. We accept Christ as our savior and are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What did it or does it mean for us to be baptized? Some of us can remember our baptism; others of us were baptized as an infant into a family and congregation of believers who agreed to order their lives and raise us up in a manner that would allow us to grow into the knowledge and love of Christ until we also were able to confirm faith in Jesus for ourselves. I was baptized as an infant and know that more from a picture of myself in a green chair with a white gown, a picture that my family has in its family album. So, I don't remember being baptized, but that I was baptized. My mother was baptized in the Turn Hole, a deep place in a creek in West Virginia on an Easter morning when there was ice around the creek's edges. She remembered clearly her baptism that morning, the cold water, her mother and father and the people of her community and congregation on the creek shore, and that she was baptized.

When we think about our baptism, we might ask ourselves, "What did it mean for us to have been baptized?" First, we should notice that there is a connection between our baptism today and John's call of the people of Israel to repentance. We too are called to repent of our sins as we trust in Jesus. In baptism we receive grace from God as we enter into the new covenant made possible by Jesus' death and resurrection. We also experience the water of baptism, a symbol of a new creation, and are reborn through it in Christ. At our baptism, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit as part of the community of believers in Jesus. We, like Jesus, experience the water of baptism and receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Those with us confirm that we

have been baptized and welcome us into the kingdom of God. We enter into a new covenant with God, who is faithful to that covenant even if we are not. At our baptism we are also given a gift for ministry by the Holy Spirit and may be given other gifts over time as needed to build up the Body of Christ. God is always, always, always faithful to this covenant. Even if we are not, God is faithful, and for us there is always a path of repentance, grace, and return to this covenant relationship with God, through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we are baptized, we enter into a life of on-going sanctification. Baptism is not the end point, but the beginning of a new life. Our new life is not a linear progression from who we were as a sinner to ever-increasing growth into the likeness of Jesus. Our new life is a progression that is messy, a life of moving forward, backward, up, down, sideways, and sometimes, in all of our messiness of trying to live this new life, moving closer to the image of Christ. There may be times when we have no faith in God at all, but God is always faithful to His promise in this new covenant, always extending grace and allowing our return to the covenant through repentance and the love of Christ. In a life of sanctification, there are and will be many moments of new interaction with the Holy Spirit. These are breathtaking moments when we are given new strength, experience a deeper touch of the love of Christ and new progress towards a more complete image of Christ. These moments may come after a time of repentance and a return to belief, and they may come in what we think is already a relationship mature in Christ. These are not moments for us to be baptized again, but times to reaffirm our baptism. It is a time to come before the Body of Christ and reaffirm our covenant with God. I would encourage any of us who so desire, who have experienced such a touch of the Holy Spirit, to ask for that service of reaffirmation at any moment in our walk with Jesus. Reaffirmation is part of a service we would do at each baptism of a new believer. This morning I am going to bless the water in the baptismal font and open the waters for us to come and remember that we were baptized. Open our hearts to God and let the Holy Spirit again touch our hearts with the love of Christ. Let me encourage us as we are led to come, to place our hand in the water, stir the water, and remember that we were baptized and that God is forever faithful to the covenant formed at our baptism. Come, place your hand in the water, stir the waters, remember that we were baptized. If you are led, come to the altar and pray. This morning, open our hearts to God, and expect the Spirit to guide us into ministry to people in this place through the gift we have been given at our baptism. Come and ask Jesus to send us out into this community to be workers in his ripe harvest that we

may once again be a church where the waters of baptism are poured over the heads of new believers, the Holy Spirit seals them as members of the new covenant with Jesus, and we reaffirm with them that we were baptized and seek to live as people of the new covenant. Come during the last hymn and stay as long as you like in prayer. Let me bless the water and then we will sing the closing hymn.

*The pastor pours the water into the font.*

*The people stand as they are able.*

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us pray.

*The pastor may raise hands in the ancient Christian posture of prayer, and invite the congregation to do likewise.*

Eternal Father: When nothing existed but chaos, you swept across the dark waters and brought forth light. In the days of Noah you saved those on the ark through water. After the flood you set in the clouds a rainbow. When you saw your people as slaves in Egypt, you led them to freedom through the sea. Their children you brought through the Jordan to the land which you promised.

In the fullness of time you sent Jesus, nurtured in the water of a womb. He was baptized by John and anointed by your Spirit. He called his disciples to share in the baptism of his death and resurrection and to make disciples of all nations. Declare his works to the nations, his glory among all the people.

*The pastor may place hands in or over the water, stir the water, or lift the water.*

Pour out your Holy Spirit, and by this gift of water call to our remembrance the grace declared to us in our baptism. For you have washed away our sins, and you clothe us with righteousness throughout our lives, that dying and rising with Christ we may share in his final victory. All praise to you, Eternal Father, through your Son Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever. Amen.

## **REAFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

*Acts of reaffirmation are not acts of rebaptism. When the congregation reaffirms the Baptismal Covenant, a deacon or pastor may invite the people to come to the water as the pastor says*

Remember your baptism and be thankful. **Amen.**

*Appropriate ways persons may use the water include: a) Touching the water and making the sign of the cross on their own foreheads; b) Scooping up the water and letting it fall back into the font; c) Scooping it over their heads, or hands, or to refresh their faces.*

Let us now join in the singing of the closing hymn, “When Jesus came to Jordon” and as you are led, come to the waters and remember your baptism.