



Isaiah 43:1-7; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

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Jesus was familiar with the sacred Scriptures of Israel, and this passage from Isaiah (43:1-7) surely came to his mind as he stepped into the stream of the River Jordan: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.”

Then, the voice of God explained the reasoning behind God’s behavior: “³ For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. ⁴ Because you are *precious* in my sight, and *honored*, and *I love you...*”

Our God, the Bible says, is a jealous God.¹ Anyone of us belongs to God and God is not keen to losing us too easily. God does not give up on us. All of us, not only called by name (Isaiah 43:1) but called more profoundly by *God’s* name (v. 7), are created for God’s glory – not because God needs our worship, praise, and adoration: God is not Self-centered. And not even because God needs our service: God doesn’t need our help to accomplish what God has in mind. But because adoring and serving God gives *us* joy and purpose and fulfillment.

¹ Deuteronomy 4:23-24; Psalm 79:5

We are precious in God's eyes. God wants us to have life in abundance: by receiving and celebrating God's call in Baptism we learn to grow in love and practice God's love.

Jesus' Baptism is a gift of God into which we are called: the value, the beauty, and the effects of this gift are nothing we can earn or produce. The gift is simply the fruit of a free desire of God to give: those called are asked to receive it with joyful and grateful hearts, in awe, in humility, in expectation to see how the unpacking of the gift changes one's life, blesses one to enjoy God, empowers one to respond in honesty and faithfulness.

People did not congregate on the banks of the River Jordan simply to repent and be cleansed. They *wondered with anticipation* about John, this holy man of God, and *contemplated many questions*. Luke tells us: "they were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts whether [John] might be the Messiah." (v.15).

Do we also wonder in anticipation what it means for us to live wet into our Baptism, to be soaked in the waters of Baptism and to walk about dripping with the blessings of Baptism? Do we remind ourselves whose we are and what we are created for as we open our eyes every morning? Do we remember who it is who called us and who has promised to be with us always?

After Jesus was baptized, he spent some time in prayer – perhaps pondering how he could have delighted God. Perhaps he wondered how he could respond to the delight God found in him, how he could live for the glory of God.

Do we also wonder in prayer how we can live our baptismal calling?

Luke tells us that at the time of his prayer the heaven ripped open, and the Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove. The sky ripped open...at Jesus' birth (Lk 2:13), at his baptism (Lk 3:21), at his death (Lk 23:44-45), at his resurrection (Lk 24:4), at his Ascension (Lk 24:50-51), at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

The sky is ripped open and God steps into our world: the Emmanuel, God-with-us. No more separation; no more isolation; no more exile away from home: God pitches a tent in our midst. What is there to fear? What will impede us from being with God, from being faithful, from being humble, from forgiving, from enduring, from witnessing?

Baptism is not about us; it's not what we do, not what we merit. And yet, God makes it about us because we are God's beloved. As we are called "by name" into an intimate relationship with God "by grace through faith," we enjoy God's presence and guidance.

Obedying God's commandments frees us from any human conditioning and deviation: we are set free to be just, to love, and to live to our fullest potentials becoming what we are meant to be.² As we submit to God, we learn how to be servants to all.³

Martin Luther, following the apostle Paul's lead,⁴ explained that once a person is freed by Jesus Christ, nothing on

² John 8:31-32,36; 14:15; 17:17; Luke 4:18-19

³ Mark 9:35;

⁴ 1 Corinthians 9:19 and Romans 13:8

earth has true dominion over that person and that person is thus free to love fully.⁵

Baptized in Jesus, we enjoy God's delight in us: let us live in his justice.

⁵ [Putting on the Neighbor](#) and [On the Freedom of a Christian - Lutheran Reformation](#)