

## **“The Lord’s Baptism”**

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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### **Scriptures**

Isaiah 43:1-3

Psalms 29:1-5, 9-11

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

### **Hymns/Songs**

Guide Me Thou, O Great Redeemer 950

Let Us Break Bread Together 265

Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God 619

### **Isaiah 43:1-3**

But now, this is what the Lord says—He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. <sup>2</sup>When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. <sup>3</sup>For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

### **Psalms 29:1-5 NIV**

Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. <sup>3</sup>The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over the mighty waters. <sup>4</sup>The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic. <sup>5</sup>The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.

### **Luke 3:15-17; 21-22**

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. 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 barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as He was praying, Heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from Heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

### **Insight for Worship**

*True Christianity* n. 684 by Emanuel Swedenborg

“Christians have the Word. In it the means of being regenerated are set forth and described; those means are faith in the Lord and goodwill toward our neighbor. This is the same as the point made about the Lord that “He baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (*Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8–11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33*) The *Holy Spirit* here means divine truth that is related to faith; the *fire* means divine goodness that is related to love and goodwill. Both emanate from the Lord. It is through these two things that the Lord carries out the entire process of regenerating us. The Lord Himself was baptized by John (*Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9; Luke 3:21, 22*) not only so as to institute baptism for the future and set the example, but also because He glorified His human nature and made it divine in the same way that He regenerates us and makes us spiritual.”

### **SERMON: “The Lord’s Baptism”**

Do you remember your own baptism? Even if you weren’t baptized this message I’m offering this morning carries deep meaning for the seeker of spiritual truth. I don’t remember when I was baptized as a baby, but I have learned enough about what the Lord does for us during our baptismal moment that I have very deep-down trust that my Lord and my God touched my heart, mind, body and soul in a very special way, and, at that precious moment I know that the Lord assigned two of His wonderfully loving and wise Christian angels to watch over me and help me as a baby and as a child.

Some of your baptisms happened when you were babies and children. Some of your baptisms happened when you were adults, and some of your baptisms happened somewhere in between. Yet, each of our baptisms have some ***very, very precious things in common***. You see my friends, each of our baptism stories reach far, far back in time....to even before you were born....to that incredible day and moment in time when our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, was baptized. Yes, your story reaches that far back, to even before you were born.

It is that story, that larger story of the Lord’s baptism, the story of someone whom God anointed with His holy outpouring Divine Spirit (which in biblical language we call the “Holy Spirit”)—and in that great and powerful moment God in the form of Jesus Christ was touched with even more power from on high, Divine Power that was His from the ***VERY BEGINNING OF ETERNITY***.

Mystically speaking, baptism links your story with powers and forces from God that reach way far back into eternity! Baptism, you see, takes hold of us, ***deep within the reaches of our being***. This special holy touch from God’s hand is really a baptismal blessing, one that re-aligns and clarifies our identity. Every time we go about doing good things in life, because those good things are actually God’s, we take another step

forward spiritually speaking and then a further re-alignment happens with our eternal story—and the **power of our baptism** flows through us anew, and we grow, more and more...bit by bit...into the likeness of God.

In *Isaiah* we read, “He who created you, He who formed you...do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine....” So in truth, my friends, we are God’s. We belong to God. And our story is also God’s story. The Divine experiences itself, *through us!*

### WHY?

In short, because love is reciprocal. The Lord’s Divine Spirit seeks to integrate with us...to join with us...to merge with us. It’s all very poetic really, very real and very personal.

God within the amazing psyche of Jesus was one of “ALL” the thousands of people John the Baptist baptized in the waters of the Jordan River. Christ was one of “ALL” of us. He may have been lumped in with everyone whom John baptized, but, there were some things about the psychological and spiritual make up of Jesus that separated Him from the rest of us.

First, our theology helps us understand that the Messiah coming is much, much, MUCH more powerful than anyone can imagine, and John understood this, to be sure. John knew that he, himself, paled in comparison with the Lord...so much so that John doesn’t even think himself worthy enough to be Jesus’ servant. John’s attitude in Scripture demonstrates **immense humility, and, a sense of awe!**

The defining difference that John points to between himself and the Holy One to come? Do you remember what it was? John’s baptism was with water and it addresses life in the here and now. But the baptism with which our Lord Jesus baptizes us with is “the Holy Spirit and with fire,” and it is not only for life right here and now, but it is also a **COSMIC FORCE!** And as a cosmic Force it has Divine power to do some really precious and beautiful things within us. This great Force of Divine Love and power that the Lord baptizes us with separates what does not belong to the Way of Life God plans for us to receive (which is symbolized by the **WHEAT**) from the trash, the garbage and the things that do not bring spiritual sustenance (represented by the **CHAFF** in this epic story).

Now, to the crowd of people who came to be baptized by John, Jesus of Nazareth was simply in their midst, hidden among the crowd, a secret among all of them—this cosmically powerful Messiah, as John the Baptist describes Him. Jesus was among them, while all of the people were being baptized. He, too, came that day to be baptized by John. Indeed, the Lord was **WITH ALL OF THEM**. Swedenborg would say that Jesus was at the beginning phase of His lifelong glorification process; for you see, His natural human was being **PREPARED TO BE MADE DIVINE**, and the order was such

that it was right for Him in that state of being or condition He was in to be baptized by John.

It is not clear within the telling of this epic story whether anyone else could see Heaven open up or the dove coming down, or whether they heard the Father's voice from Heaven belt out His Love for the Son of Man. And so, on the one hand, Jesus is the awe-inspiring, all-powerful Cosmic Christ who has the Power deep within Him to enact from an eternal Source, and yet, He is also "one of us"...unknown while among us (amongst the throngs of people coming to John for vital spiritual help and support. Yes, the Messiah King Himself melded in with the crowds that day, in our midst but not demanding anything from us.

Yet even still, although Jesus is one of the "ALL," a member of the brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind....He is also....**SET APART, ISN'T HE?** I mean think about this with me, okay? It was **NOT** the baptism of Jesus itself that was pivotal to Heaven opening up and the blessing of God's Divinity coming down like a peaceful dove lighting down: it was **Jesus Himself who caused all of that awesome unfolding to happen.** Jesus is not only the **GREAT FARMER** with a winnowing fork in hand, coming to separate the "wheat from the chaff," He is also the **CAUSE AND MANIFESTATION OF BELOVEDNESS.**

Because Jesus purposefully places Himself among us, and joins us in our humanity, hides Himself for a time in our flesh, **AND** He takes upon Himself the sins of the world. As the Father loves Jesus, so the Father loves us; as the Holy Spirit (or Divine Love-and-Life Force emanating forth from God's Being) comes upon Jesus, so the Spirit comes upon us. We know that **GOD KNOWS WHAT GOD IS DOING IN THE INCARNATION ... AND GOD IS PLEASED TO DO IT BECAUSE GOD IS LOVE!**

And this glorious Divine Love comes down in dove-like form, while Jesus is at prayer. He goes to quiet places to commune with the Father-Divinity living deep inside of Him, for God was His very soul. The Lord did that time and again. We see within the verses of Scripture that Jesus prayed at key moments throughout His story of life on Earth, and it all really began for Christ in a full-blown way at the beginning of His baptism. He is **REVEALED** at His baptism to be a **pray-er**, the God of the universe prays while incarnated on Earth to share and commune with us. And the Risen Lord continues to pray for us, even now...whenever we need His super-divine-loving-wise power and help.

Do you feel His prayers for you? Prayer of course is an essential feature of baptism living into us. Prayer matters deeply to God. What is the Lord's prayer for you right now? Today? In this very moment? Where do you need the very, very deeply loving, healing wisdom of the Lord in your winding road of life?

The Risen-Glorified Lord is **MEEKLY PRESENT AMONG US**, hidden, quiet and...this Divine-Human One is **COMING WITH POWER** to transform all that there is—in you and among us all! Believe it. Hope in it. Because it comes to fulfill His regenerative work within us all—within everyone who allows the Lord to change them, through repentance, reformation and regeneration. We are all able to participate in all of these aspects of the Lord's unfolding revelation, His baptism....because **OUR** story is His story. And **HIS** story is our story...and we are being transformed into His likeness...one good word, one good moment and one good choice at a time.

We can become the Lord's ever-outpouring epiphany to the world, for we were all born to become a part of the Light, which comes to lighten the gentiles. As Christ our Divine Light said, "...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven." (Mtt. 5:16) Amen.