

## Jesus' Baptism: Luke 3: 15-22

Read Luke 3: 16

Here's a poem; a short one. What does this mean to you?

*Some say the world will end in fire. Some say in ice.  
From what I've tasted of desire, I hold with those who favour fire.  
But if it had to perish twice, I know that for destruction, ice is also great  
And would suffice.*

What does that mean? It's Robert Frost. What did he want to say?

John the Baptizer said: (read verses 16 and 17)

Fire. With the Holy Spirit and with fire. Have YOU been baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire?

Luke's account of Jesus; own baptism is quite different from the other gospels, don't you find? Who baptized him? Where?

NONE of that comes from Luke. At the beginning of chapter 3, Luke says that John went out to all the regions around the Jordan, and people came to him to be baptized. He preached for people to prepare the way of the Lord, and that, as Isaiah had said centuries before, the time was coming, and soon, when God would break into history and establish a reign and realm so all-encompassing that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God".

He took the "all flesh" part very seriously, too. He meant it. And he meant that the people should do so as well. He said to them

Vs 8 & 9

You're not the only ones. Don't even think God's love is only for you – or that the blessings and obligations of God's claim are on you alone. So you live in a Christian country? So your grandparents are members? Founded this church? Cleared this land? Irrelevant. It's YOU we're talking about here. YOU. Who are YOU? What is God's claim on your life?

Vs 8

(An aside – this can be good news or bad, depending on how you've been living with or using or defining yourself with respect to your ancestors. Some of us rest on our laurels, or on our parents' laurels, for reputation, for status, sometimes for money too, and for our religion. This is far less so here, I find, than it was in the Maritimes where I lived and worked for years. There, everyone typically knows you by your family, by your parents, and you live for good or bad in their shadows, in every way. Here, many of us have come

with no family connections and there is a certain freedom in that...and fear too because in many ways we need to recreate ourselves, learn what it is to be ourselves apart from an automatic “in” or “out” because of who we are and where we’ve come from)

John said – forget what your parents and grandparents did or didn’t do religiously. This is about YOU.

The people asked John – “what then should we do?”  
Do you remember what he said?

V 10-14

And then when they were wondering whether the Messiah was John himself, he replies with this.

V 16-18

Finally, Luke gets to Jesus’ own baptism. And he does it in half a verse. (Read it ...)

Clearly, for Luke, the important part is not Jesus’ baptism, but what happened before, and after. He doesn’t use it to make a point that J is the chosen One of God; Luke made THAT point in the birth narrative.

Here, we have affirmation not so much for Jesus, but for us, and an empowerment of the one already chosen, for his ministry.

We’re shown J here as the servant king – the sovereign servant (the voice from heaven quotes from a Psalm used at the coronation of a king, and also a servant song), who has come to baptize us with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

The experience of coming to know Jesus  
The experience of knowing yourself to be loved, forgiven and claimed  
Is like being touched and filled with fire

To experience the Holy Spirit – the daily indwelling of the Light, the life, the hope and power, that is an invitation to live in the fire. For me, the expresses in poetry what can’t be expressed any other way; what it is to live in the Light. Close to the heartbeat of life; right now. Living in the fire. Good expression. Living in the light; in the fire.

The fire of a passion for living  
A relishing of the waters of life in which you have been born and born again  
Biting into the world and letting the juice run down your chin....  
You know?  
Feelings. Passion. Heat. Commitment. Fire.  
Giving yourself completely. To God; to another person, to something worth living for.

Finding each day things that delight you and call to you and touch you deeply and require of you something of your being.

Perhaps it will be your tears that are required of you

Perhaps your devotion; your anger, your assumed integrity, your long cherished ideas – perhaps it will be like that. Hard.

But to live in the fire is to live with intensity, and risk, and an openness that leads you to vulnerability that risks agony as well as ecstasy.

To live in the fire is not to live without discipline, however. I'm not talking about an emotional free-for-all. The fire of God's presence calls you to the discipline of listening regularly and deeply for the voice of the flame within you. Becoming attuned to your own truest self (which is where the spirit dwells) this takes practice, and the help of others. Worship. Prayer. Meditation, conversation. Study of scripture, other study.

Remember the burning bush? Remember Pentecost? The fire is an image in scripture absolutely packed with light. It speaks of the call to justice, the acceptance of all....so often it's been abused by people to be a symbol of judgment when scripturally speaking it's quite the opposite.

The fire of the spirit of God calls us to a passionate commitment to ethical living.

John said repent. They said what should we do?

He said

(read it)

Being baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire is to live caring deeply for yourself and for others.

And for the world God created.

And, living your life finding brave and creative ways to embody that caring which is a spark lit from the blazing fire of God's all consuming love. For this world

It's an unquenchable fire – **the only unquenchable fire there is.**

And when you're set ablaze by it, the world changes.

To get up every morning, to face the world with zest, and to have that burning within you; that light shining inside – the fire of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That's what that is.

Shining, burning away all the unnecessary things that block the heat, smother the flame, and keep away the vital oxygen it needs to grow and thrive. (Because there ARE things that can smother the flame – but the flame is stronger, and given a chance can burn away all those ultimately inconsequential things.

When you face the world with the light and flame inside you

Knowing that the fire will meet you on the outside

It makes the pettiness, the nitpicking, the gossip, the fault-finding – it makes it all...sad somehow, but not overwhelming. Because the fire is warm and strong. And the Light is powerful. One small light...can light a whole room. Trite, but true. And the other things? The violence, the control, the greed and deliberate abuse of persons and of the earth....)

Live with the fire. It will lead you to deal passionately and bravely with forces that seem insurmountable. The fire in the burning bush called Moses to lead the people out of slavery. The fire of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost sent them out into all the world from a very small beginning.

The fire calls you to daring works against the principalities and powers that claim they are the fire and are not

You can dare

You can give yourself bravely and joyfully to the task

Not because anyone is going to notice

Not even because you think you are going to win

But because you have to look at yourself in the mirror every morning

And because you live in the fire and it would burn inside you until you followed its call.

Jesus came to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire

Let the claim of his baptism be yours.

Let the fire and the light of God's presence fill you with unquenchable love of life and passionate desire to serve the God of light and fire and joy.

Amen