

# Sunday's Sermon

## Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

January 12, 2025

The Reverend David E. Fox

Baptism of Our Lord (Year C) 2025

Luke 3.15-17, 21-22

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

The Reverend Doctor Delmer Chilton shares that in the book, *None of These Diseases*, McMillen tells the story of a high school senior who was applying for admission to college. She was anxious with the question, "Are you a leader?" She knew that every college was looking for leaders, but she felt that she needed to be honest and her answer was "no." After finishing the application, which expressed that she was not a leader, she sent in the application with the expectation that she would be rejected. Several weeks later, she received a letter from the college that said: "*Dear Applicant; A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you, because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower.*"<sup>i</sup>

She was expecting what society had set her up to believe, yet she was surprised by the reality.

Our Gospel reading begins with, "As the people were filled with expectation..." What were they expecting? I'll be upfront with you, they were not expecting Jesus. Yes, they were expecting the Messiah, but they didn't expect that the Messiah would be Jesus. Our reading tells us that John was on their radar. John fit the part of a prophet, he ate like one, dressed like one, and talked like one, and they had not heard from a prophet in hundreds of years. But John was no knight in shining armor. They were expecting a George Patton type Messiah. Those listening to John were expecting what society had set them up to believe, yet they would be surprised by the reality that their Messiah was born in a barn and was poor.

This baptism of Jesus, in the book of Luke, is a bit different from the others. It's not quite what we expected, because we know that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan by John. However, if we take a close look here, Jesus is baptized; but Luke, the evangelist who is all about details, does not mention where Jesus was baptized, and by who Jesus was baptized. In fact, the few verses that are skipped over today has John in prison, and then Jesus is baptized. I think Luke's point here is that the place and the person presiding, were of no importance here. Jesus' baptism is different than that of the one John was offering up.

This Gospel reading isn't quite what we expected to hear. In fact, there is a lot that happens in this text, but there seems to be very little amazement from others in this story. Jesus is baptized with other people. After being baptized, he began to pray. Heaven was opened. The Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. A voice from heaven said, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." These are all magnificent events, but not one came to know or believe that Jesus was the Messiah that day. In fact, Jesus had to go out later and find folks who would follow him. My expectation here is that everyone would be amazed at what happened, but

the reality is that no one seems to know. Yes, we know, but that's because we already know the story. We believers expect everyone to know the story of Jesus, but the reality is that they don't.

Brothers and sisters, as Lutherans, most of us were born into this Christian faith. It's been taught to us by faithful followers, family, friends, Sunday school teachers, VBS volunteers, and well, we know the story of Jesus; we may not know Scripture well, but we have the basics down for who Jesus is and why Jesus matters. And since we are surrounded by this Jesus culture, we have an expectation that everyone knows about Jesus, but the reality is that they don't. We also have a naïve expectation that when folks leave our church, they find a new church family, and the reality is that they don't. Our expectations set us up for disappointment.

Part of the problem is that once we feel we are in the safe spot of going to heaven, we have no work to do. Pastor Delmer makes this point, "Too often, too many of us act as though we have been baptized with John's baptism only, redeemed from the past, but not empowered for the future<sup>ii</sup>." We can't expect that the world knows about Jesus, brothers and sisters, if we're not the people telling them the story. Why? Because that's our job as children of God. We are empowered at the waters of Baptism, when we are named and claimed, and the Holy Spirit descends on us and dwells with us, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, his love, his death, his resurrection, his life giving sacraments, his Church, his message for them. Our baptism is not to just be life-altering for us; it is to be life-altering to the world.

If being a Child of God means showing up to worship whenever I feel like it, then that's not what I want to be a part of. However, if being a Child of God means feeding the hungry, visiting the widow, welcoming the stranger, telling others the story of Jesus and more, then sign us all up. We've not been baptized like that of John's baptism. Rather, we have been baptized by Christ Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit. And our God calls out to us and says, "You are my beloved, with you I am well pleased." Why is God pleased with us, because he has not only empowered us to spread the Good News of Christ, he expects us to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to all the world.

Now, I'm not asking you all to become some sort of scary person that runs people off because you cram Jesus down their throat. Brothers and sisters, the way we start to share Jesus with people is by beginning a real relationship with a person, and that person might even be different than us in many ways. Begin the relationship, live out the life that God has called you to live, and in everything you say and do have it point to Jesus. In Via de Cristo and in Emmaus we learn the line "Make a friend. Be a friend. Bring your friend to Christ." If your expectation is that by sharing Jesus you will scare people away, you may be surprised at the reality that your sharing of Jesus is just what they needed.

Sisters and Brothers, you have been empowered by the Holy Spirit, through water and Word; you have been named and claimed by God; now go out expecting to see Jesus as you share his story and his love with the world.

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<sup>i</sup> Chilton, Delmer. *LectioaryLab.com*. Baptism of Our Lord (Year C) 2013. 1/7/2025.  
<http://lectionarylab.com/2013/01/>

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.