

**GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The First Sunday after the Epiphany (The Baptism of our Lord) [Year C]

Isaiah 43.1-7

Psalm 29

Acts 8.14-17

Luke 3.15-17, 21-22

**Isaiah 43.1-7**

1. This lesson is from “Deutero-Isaiah” (Second Isaiah), which comprises chs. 40-55 of the book bearing the prophet’s name.
  - a. Deutero-Isaiah was written during the Babylonian Exile (6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> C., B.C.)
    - i. This lesson is from the section known to scholars as the “Book of Comfort”.
    - ii. Chs. 41 to 47 set forth a systematized theology of creative redemption.
2. The present verses are from a poem in which the return of Israel from exile is interpreted as a new creation.
  - a. New creation is here described in the context of blood relationship, that Israel are the children of God.
  - b. The words “create, form, name” form an *inclusio* (a discrete unit) with the words found in ch. 42, as does the reference to fire.
  - c. The Hebrew construction is as a series of participles.
    - i. Thus, where the sentences in English read as a reference to past and future actions of God, in Hebrew the action is stated as continuous and ongoing.
      1. It is in God’s nature to save.
3. The great ingathering of Israel will exceed all expectations, because God is referred to as *gō’ēl* (rendered at 41.10 as *gě’altîkā*, “kinsman”).
  - a. God is referred to specifically as “Savior,” as the one who offers ransom for His own.
    - i. Compare these descriptions of God’s *nature* (noting the Hebrew participial construction) with the name “Jesus,” which means “the LORD saves”.
      1. The Name reveals the nature.

**Psalm 29**

1. This psalm represents a powerful expression of God’s supremacy and universal rule.
  - a. First the heavenly court is addressed, then God’s glory is described, then is described the acclaim offered God in the heavenly court, with the court and the earthly Temple being deliberately conflated.
2. The psalm refers to “gods” (literally “sons of El”). In Israel explicit monotheism is probably to be dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> C., B.C.
  - a. Regardless of how such “gods” are characterized, they are described as subservient to the LORD.

- i. It is perhaps more helpful to think of such “gods” (referred to also in Pss. 8.6; 58.2; and 82.1,6) as part of the celestial hierarchy (of angels), as described by Paul at Col. 1.16.
- ii. Angels are created beings, whereas God is before all creation.
  - 1. All the heavenly court thus cries “Glory!” (*cf.* Revelation), with this cry echoed on earth (as a response to the description of God’s power, found throughout the psalm).

### **Acts 8.14-17**

1. This brief lesson from Acts gives an example of the action of the Holy Spirit (as a parallel to the description of the descent of the Spirit in the gospel lesson)
  - a. Philip is described earlier in the chapter as baptizing in Samaria.
    - i. However, according to v. 16, those baptized by Philip have *not* received the Spirit!
    - ii. This is explained by the need for communion in the Church.
2. Whether conferred before baptism (as at 10.47-48) or after baptism (at 19.6), the Spirit operates where there is communion of believers, with these believers being in communion with the apostles who, as “witnesses of the resurrection” (1.22), certify the continuing activity of the risen Jesus on earth.
3. The Spirit is not controlled by ritual or office (v. 15). The Spirit remains a gift (and an inviolable one, witness the comeuppance of Simon Magus at v. 20, *cf.* 2.38; 10.45; 11.17), but communion with the Church matters.
  - a. “Apostolic succession” flows from this, that of the laying on of hands by the apostles, in succession through generations of bishops, preserves to this day the communion of each baptized Christian with the original witnesses.

### **Luke 3.15-17, 21-22**

1. The accounts of Jesus’ baptism differ in subtle details. Important details include:
  - a. Matthew and Mark refer to Jesus coming to John to be baptized. Luke only refers to baptisms taking place, and Jesus being baptized along with the people present. John’s reference is less clear; he refers to the baptism as an accomplished fact.
    - i. Jesus submits to baptism to show His solidarity with John's proclamation of God’s plan of salvation.
2. Each evangelist refers to the descent of the Spirit “as a dove”:
  - a. Mark uses, originally, a Hebrew simile: “dovelike descent”. Matthew follows this.
  - b. Luke adds “*in bodily form like a dove*”. This phrase is found only in Luke, as is a Hellenism meaning “really”.
  - c. John’s reference is more metaphorical.
  - d. In Mark and Luke, the voice of the Father (“You are my Son ...”) is heard by *Jesus*, not by the crowd.

- e. In Matthew, the crowd hears the Father say “This is my beloved Son ...”
  - f. In John, only John hears the Father name Jesus as His Son. John testifies to this to the crowd.
3. “[T]he heaven was opened.” This is a prophetic and eschatological symbol indicating divine revelation being made (*cf.* Ezek. 1.1; Isa. 64.1).
4. “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”
- a. This pronouncement combines Ps. 2.7 and Isa. 42.1.
    - i. Jesus is called to assume the power which was His since His conception (1.32, 35).
    - ii. At this juncture of the story, when Jesus is about to journey through Galilee proclaiming God’s kingdom, Luke reminds his readers who Jesus really is.
    - iii. Luke will remind of this again at 9.35, as Jesus sets His face to Jerusalem and death.