

## **EPIPHANY: IN FAITH WE PROCLAIM GOD'S LOVE FOR ALL PEOPLE**

**The Baptism of Our Lord**  
**First Sunday after the Epiphany**  
**January 7, 2007**

**Isaiah 43:1-7**

**Psalm 29**

**Acts 8:14-17**

**Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**

### **The Lord Calls Us By Name**

The baptism of Jesus, as recorded in Luke's Gospel, differs slightly from the accounts given in Matthew and Mark. Matthew and Mark clearly state that Jesus was baptized by John at the Jordan River. Yet, in Luke's account, John's role is not mentioned explicitly at Jesus' baptism. John appears at the beginning of the third chapter as one who paves the way for Jesus, saying that "someone more powerful" than he is going to come (3:16). In dramatic fashion, John sets the stage for the appearance of Jesus – one who will "baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire" and who will come with "a threshing fork in his hand ... ready to separate the wheat from the husks" (3:16, 17, *CEV*).

Luke mentions that the people were filled with expectation (3:15) concerning John, and wondered, "Could John be the Messiah?" No, John tells them. He is not even worthy to untie the thongs of the Messiah's sandals (3:16). At John's birth, Zechariah prophesied that John would "go ahead of the Lord to get everything ready for him" (1:76, *CEV*); and Luke includes the prophetic words of Isaiah (40:3) in John's opening proclamation (3:4). Just prior to the two verses that record Jesus' baptism (3:21, 22), Luke removes John from the scene by describing John's imprisonment at the hands of Herod.

Luke's narrative now shifts its focus from the ministry of John to that of Jesus. His describing Jesus' baptism as taking place along with the baptism of others seems to signal that, although Jesus is God's Son, "the Beloved," he has come to be a servant (Luke 22:27), proclaim good news and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18), and usher in the Kingdom of God.

John baptized with water (3:16) as a sign of repentance and forgiveness. Jesus cleanses and redeems us by his precious blood (Hebrews 9:12-14). On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter admonished his listeners to "Turn back to God" and be "baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven" (Acts 2:38, *CEV*).

In the waters of baptism, we die to sin and begin a new life of obedience to God (Romans 6:1-7). As beloved children of God and heirs of the Kingdom (Ephesians 1:5, 11), we have received from God "the Holy Spirit, who fills our hearts with love" (Romans 5:5,

*CEV*). In the passage from Isaiah (43:1, *CEV*), we hear God's word of assurance: "Don't be afraid. I have rescued you. I have called you by name; now you belong to me."

This week's Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship

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**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Micronesia –**

With thanks to God for the launch of the Kosrean Bible last year and with prayers that it will have a positive impact on many people; **Indonesia** – With thanks to God for the launch of the first Indonesian Study Bible, and with prayers for all the ongoing translation and revision work, for the nationwide radio program, *Gema Nafiri*, and through the Literacy and New Reader programs which are operating in Bengkulu;

**Philippines** – With thanks to God for the new printing plant, and with prayers for National Bible Week which will be celebrated January 22-28 and for God's guidance in drawing up plans to build a Bible Adventure Museum in the new Bible House.

**Activity Corner:** "Beloved Children of God" Poster

Supplies needed: Bible; drawing paper and crayons for young children; poster board; marker; pencils or pens.

Compare Luke's version of Jesus' baptism and the preaching of John the Baptist (3:1-22) with those of Matthew (3:13-17) and Mark (1:1-11). What similarities do you find? What differences? Discuss these similarities and differences with members of your household. Young children may be encouraged to draw a picture of the story based on Luke's Gospel.

Read Isaiah 43:1-7. Across the top of a poster board write, "WE ARE BELOVED OF THE LORD" and underneath write, "I Have Called You By Name. You Belong to Me. (Isaiah 43:1)" List the names of everyone in your household (or have everyone write their own name). Invite each one to affix their photo next to their name or to draw a picture of themselves. Encourage everyone to discuss what it means to belong to God. Conclude by singing "Hush, Hush, Somebody's Callin' My Name" or one of your favorite hymns.