



Defining Moments

January 11 • 2009

Focus Scripture Mark 1:4–11

Additional Scriptures
Genesis 1:1–5
Psalm 29
Acts 19:1–7

God of power and of love, at his baptism you called Jesus your beloved son and sent your Spirit upon him. May we, born of water and of the Spirit, know ourselves to be beloved by you. Help us to rejoice in the new life to which you call us. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access *Spirit Sightings* for connections between current events and the focus passage.

In the defining moment of baptism, there is a new beginning for Jesus and for all who would follow him in the days and years to come. God affirms the goodness of creation and calls Jesus “beloved.” As we grow in understanding our own baptism, we rejoice that we also are God’s beloved. With the psalmist, we say, “Glory!”

Focus Scripture: Mark 1:4–11

Mark’s gospel is characterized by urgency – events happen at a rapid pace. In these opening verses, John the Baptizer bursts on the scene with a shocking message: Israel must repent and return to God’s ways.

John is a dramatic figure, dressed like the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), whose return was said to herald the coming of God’s Messiah. John preaches by the Jordan River, evoking images of Moses, the exodus from Egypt, and the entry of God’s people into the land of promise. People are intrigued by John’s message, and crowds flock to listen. This is enough to make the civil and religious authorities anxious. They wonder: who is John, and what does this message of repentance mean?

John proclaims that a more powerful one is coming; his ministry prepares a receptive audience for Jesus. The gospel writer strives to show followers of John and Jesus that Jesus is the one to follow – the one sent from God to reveal God’s ways. John’s baptism cleanses from sin, but baptism with the Holy Spirit transforms individuals and society. God will be present through the Spirit, bringing new life in God’s reign.

Each of the gospels includes the story of Jesus’ baptism, the defining moment that marks the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. Jesus comes to the Jordan to participate in John’s baptism, going down into the water and coming up again. Jesus shares our humanity and participates in the experience of the people. In Mark’s telling, only Jesus sees the heavens open and the Spirit descend like a dove. Only Jesus hears the voice from heaven: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Perhaps this is why the disciples, throughout Mark’s gospel, are slow to understand who Jesus is.

Today is Baptism of Jesus Sunday, an invitation

to enter into the mystery and wonder of Baptism. Baptism is important to our identity as Christians, as it is the defining moment in which we enter into the Christian family. This day invites reflection on the relationship between God and Jesus, defined in Jesus’ baptism as special and different from all other relationships. Consider what it means that God says to each of us, “You are my beloved child.”

The other texts paint a picture of God who creates, redeems, and strengthens. **Genesis 1:1–5** gives a vivid picture of the work of God the creator. Water is an image of power, both life-giving and destructive. A wind from God (God’s Spirit) brings order out of the watery chaos. God creates by speaking and calls the creation “good.” Creation is beloved and God is pleased with it.

Psalm 29 is an enthronement psalm, celebrating the majesty of God as ruler enthroned over the whole world. God’s powerful voice creates, moving over the waters. God’s power is seen in thunder, whirlwind, and flame. God brings salvation to all people and blesses with peace.

In **Acts 19:1–7**, it is reported that Paul visits Christians in Ephesus and finds that some of them have been baptized by John. When Paul baptizes them in the name of Jesus, they receive the Holy Spirit, who strengthens and guides.



All people are part of God’s good creation and loved by God. The God whose powerful voice moves over the waters is making a new creation, of which we are a part. At his baptism, Jesus heard God’s voice call him “beloved.” What does it mean to pass through baptismal waters into the new life that God bestows in Jesus Christ? What is your response to hearing God call you “beloved”?

