

Baptism of the Lord - Luke 3: 15-16, 21-22

An intoxicated gentleman stumbles across a baptismal service on Sunday afternoon down by the river. He proceeds to walk down into the water and stand next to the Preacher. The minister turns and notices the man and says, "Mister, are you ready to find Jesus?" The intoxicated man looks back and says, "Yes, Preacher. I sure am." The minister then dunks the fellow under the water and pulls him right back up. "Have you found Jesus?" the preacher asked. "No, I didn't!" said the drunk. The preacher then dunks him under for quite a bit longer, brings him up and says, "Now, brother, have you found Jesus?" "No, I did not, Reverend." The preacher in disgust holds the man under for at least 30 seconds this time, then brings him out of the water and says in a harsh tone, "My God, have you found Jesus yet?" The old drunk wipes his eyes and says to the preacher... **"Are you sure this is where he fell in?"**

We cannot see the Holy Spirit. Spirits have no bodily form so they are invisible. Because of this, over the centuries the Church has developed **images** to point to who the Holy Spirit is.

One of the most common images is that of a dove, and that image derives from today's gospel. Luke tells us that after Jesus was baptized the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove.

Now of course the Holy Spirit is not a dove. A dove is only an **image** that points to the presence of the Spirit and how the Spirit works in our lives.

But what is the truth to which this image points? This is not an easy question to answer because doves occur only infrequently in the Bible and in a variety of different contexts. So, the best we can do is pick one of those contexts and ask how it can reveal something about the Holy Spirit.

The passage I would like to consider is the first time that a dove appears in the bible. It occurs in the Book of Genesis, in the story of Noah.

Noah is in the ark, and the entire world is covered with the waters of the flood. There is no hope for Noah, his family, or the animals in the ark unless the waters of the flood recede.

So, Noah sends out a dove. In the evening the dove returns with an olive leaf in its beak. The leaf is a sign that dry land is appearing, an assurance to Noah and those who are with him in the ark that they have a future.

The dove from the Book of Genesis suggests that the Holy Spirit is the one who brings us signs of life in hopeless situations. The Holy Spirit is the one who assures us that we have a future, even in a hostile world.

This is a true action of God's Spirit because our inclination is to focus on what is wrong, what is dangerous, what is fearful. That focus can over time can lessen and stunt our lives.

Some of the people we love, family members and friends, have made disastrous choices or are dealing with sickness or financial stress. It is easy for us to give up and say, "They will never be happy."

The Holy Spirit is the one who reminds us that there is still goodness in their lives and in our relationship with them, and that goodness can have an effect.

When we look at what is wrong with our country—how many of our elected officials seem to be more interested in grandstanding than in service, it is easy for us to say that things are falling apart and there will never again be a time when we can work together as a nation.

The Holy Spirit is the one who reminds us that many of our elected officials work hard and effectively, that there are still aspects of our democracy that we should admire, and that we can still be proud to live in this country.

When we look at what is dangerous in our world, dangerous because of poverty, pollution, or terrorism, it is easy for us to be afraid. The Holy Spirit is the one who reminds us that we can still work together and make a difference. We can move towards security as a country without compromising our deepest values.

We all received the Holy Spirit at our baptism, and so it is our right and our duty to call upon the Spirit to show us what is positive around us.

Like Noah sending out a dove over troubled waters, we can send out God's Spirit to find goodness, peace, and hope. We can ask God's Spirit to bring us signs of life, so that we can believe that all is not lost and that we still have a future.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. AMEN.