

## United With Christ, We Live

*By Linda Rex*

**January 7, 2024, Baptism of the Lord | Epiphany**—As we move into the season of Epiphany, we are reminded of the magnitude of what Christ initiated for us in his incarnation. Here, in taking on our human flesh and living as a human being, Jesus formed within our human flesh the capacity to receive and be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, so we could have the very presence of God living within us. Even though every part of our human existence is filled with the presence of the Spirit in some way, when we personally come to faith in Christ, we are individually united with Christ, and so joined together in union with Father, Son, and Spirit and with other members of the Body of Christ. What Jesus did for all now personally becomes our very own by the Spirit as we trust in him.

In our New Testament reading for this Sunday, Acts 19:1–7, we read how the apostle Paul traveled to the city of Ephesus, where he came across some believers. As he interacted with them, Paul realized that something was missing in their relationship with God. They had been baptized by John the Baptizer, but had not paid close enough attention to John's teaching. If they had been more attentive, they would have realized that John was pointing them to Jesus Christ, telling them that even though he baptized them in water, the Christ would baptize them in the Holy Spirit. And this was what Paul realized they were lacking—the indwelling presence of God through Jesus by the Spirit.

It was important that these believers came to repentance and sought the forgiveness of sins. But there was more involved than a simple recognition of their need to change the way they were living or to be baptized in water. What Paul pointed out to them was their need for the Holy Spirit—the One who would unite them with Christ so that all Jesus did for them in his life, death, resurrection and ascension would become their very own. The Spirit was the One who would enable them to share in and participate in a real way in Christ's own life with the Father, and all of the perfections which Jesus formed within our human flesh, and now bears in glory.

So, with Paul's instruction and encouragement, these twelve persons were baptized in the name of Jesus. Being baptized in Jesus' name meant that they were in essence, baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit—and so they received the gift of the indwelling Spirit which enabled them to personally participate within the Triune life and love. As they opened themselves up to the presence of God more fully, they were moved to speak of the glories and goodness of God. The Spirit moved them profoundly, which testified to Paul that the Spirit was genuinely present in and with them in a new way.

Too often, our modern religious experience has to do with forms, practices, rituals, and/or dogma. Often, this is why we reject anything having to do with Christianity. While these things can be and often are helpful, they miss the point of it all. There is only one central issue, and that is our life is in Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ alone. There is only one human being who has ever lived in right relationship with God in every moment, never having thought, done, or said anything inappropriate or sinful. And that person is not us. And that person still lives today in right relationship with our Father in the Spirit. And that Person is Jesus Christ.

Whether or not we believe it, we desperately need Jesus in our everyday existence, in every moment, in every thought and every experience of life. Even though we often believe we do just fine without him, we were meant for so much more than what we experience here in this broken world. We just don't realize, often, that having Jesus Christ live in us and through us would transform our human experience, moving us into an existence which we were always meant to have—one which is authentically human, where we truly love God and love others as we were created to do.

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Even though our human flesh will not be fully restored and renewed until the new heaven and earth are established, we do have the miracle of God's indwelling presence through Jesus in the Spirit as our own, as we trust in Christ's finished work. When the Spirit indwells us, we discover an inner companion, a Guide, Friend, and Comforter, who never abandons us, but walks with us through every circumstance of life. This is a relationship with a divine Person, who is just like Jesus—in fact, you cannot tell the difference between the two, for they are one.

And as the Spirit lives in us, Jesus and the Father live in us, and that is all possible because of what Jesus did for us when he embraced our human flesh, obeyed John's called to repentance and baptism, received the Spirit for us, and lived our life, died our death and rose again. How blessed we are to share in Christ's own relationship with our Father in the Spirit!

*Heavenly Father, Son, and Spirit, thank you for the life you forged for all of us, transforming our human existence and giving us new life. Jesus, I believe you lived my life, died my death, and rose again. Jesus, baptize me anew with your Holy Spirit. I receive the Spirit you sent on all, and ask you to awaken me anew to your indwelling presence. Heavenly Spirit, illuminate me so that I might see our Father and his Son, as they live in me, and I in them, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*"It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they said to him, 'No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.' And he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' And they said, 'Into John's baptism.' Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying."* Acts 19:1–7 NASB

*"John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. And he was preaching, and saying, 'After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.' In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: 'You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.'"* Mark 1:4–11 NASB