

**Sunday, December 4, 2011**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon – “Baptized With the Holy Spirit”**

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People were flocking to the Jordan River to be baptized by John.

They were responding to his cry for repentance-they wanted to be cleansed in the holy waters.

So why does Mark start his gospel with this scene?

Why no Christmas story from Mark?

I think that the conditions of Jesus’ birth are not important to Mark.

For him, the important thing is being ready to receive Christ into your heart.

Jesus will appear in the very next verse of this chapter, presenting himself to John for baptism.

How appropriate that we would celebrate the sacrament of baptism for Katalina this morning, while Mark is reminding us of its importance in our Christian journey.

Today, this second Sunday of advent we have the opportunity to celebrate both of the sacraments of our church.

Baptism and Eucharist.

Baptism – a welcoming into the Christian community and

Communion – a remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice for us.

In addition, we are reminded of the power of the Holy Spirit to cleanse us, welcome us, build us up and send us out.

We are told that John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit.

John’s story is such an interesting one.

Before he was even conceived he was deemed holy.

An angel had visited his father, Zechariah, an elderly high priest and told him that his wife, Elizabeth would bear a son who was to be called John.

Later when Jesus mother Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, the child was said to have leapt in her womb.

We know that John and Jesus were cousins, but we don’t know anything about their relationship prior to the time when John was preaching baptism of repentance at the Jordan River.

I love the character of John the Baptist, the one who wore camel hair clothing with a leather belt around his waist and ate locust and honey.

He appeared in the wilderness calling for the people to repent, announcing “the Kingdom of Heaven has come near. “

John was not what anyone was expecting in the person of a prophet, just as Jesus would not be the King-type figure they were seeking.

As we enter this second week of Advent, who are you preparing for?

How will you recognize the one who comes to baptize you with the Holy Spirit?

So often we make assumptions about other people based on our, often inaccurate, perceptions of their lives.

I came across this somewhat sarcastic, but pointed, Advent prayer:

“Heavenly Father,

Help us remember that the jerk who cut us off in traffic last night is a single mother who worked nine hours that day and is rushing home to cook dinner, help with homework, do the laundry and spend a few precious moments with her children.

Help us to remember that the pierced, tattooed, disinterested young man who can't make change correctly is a worried 19-year-old college student, balancing his apprehension over final exams with his fear of not getting his student loans for next semester.

Remind us, Lord, that the bedraggled man begging for money in the same spot every day is a slave to addictions that we can only imagine in our worst nightmares.

Help us to remember that the old couple walking slowly through the store aisles and blocking our shopping progress are savoring this moment, knowing that, based on the biopsy report she got back last week, this will be the last year that they go shopping together.

Heavenly Father, remind us each day that, of all the gifts you give us, the greatest gift is love.

Open our hearts not to just those who are close to us, but to all humanity.

Let us be slow to judge and quick to forgive, show patience, empathy and love.”

Slow to judge, quick to forgive, show patience, empathy and love.

These are the behaviors that we are called to model as followers of Jesus Christ.

These are advent challenges.

Advent is the time that we open our hearts and souls to God.

It is the time that we take stock of what we are doing to prepare for the coming of the savior.

It is a time when we listen for God's call in our lives.

John the Baptist was quite clear what his call was.

He knew what part he was to play in the preparation.

He did not attempt to make himself more important than he was.

He was able to acknowledge that his gifts and talents were to be used baptizing people with water, and calling for repentance.

He knew that his job was to prepare the way for the savior to come.

We must examine our own sense of call and acknowledge what it is that God is calling us to do.

Take stock of the gifts that you have and spend some time reflecting on how those gifts might be used to help the world.

In 1980, the day before he was assassinated in El Salvador, Archbishop Oscar Romero said:

“Beautiful is the moment in which we understand that we are no more than an instrument of God; we live only as long as God wants us to live; we can only do as much as God makes us able to do; we are only as intelligent as God would have us be.”

This Advent season, let us listen carefully for a voice calling out of the wilderness.

Let us turn our hearts, first to repentance, and then to forgiveness.

Let us listen carefully for God’s call and discern exactly what we are to be doing with the gifts that have been created in us.

As we reflect on our own baptism and as we approach this communion table – let us do so knowing that God’s abundant grace is available to all.