

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Baptism of the Lord, January 10, 2021

Beloved Belonging

Mark 1:4-11

1:4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

1:5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

1:6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

1:7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals."

1:8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

1:9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

1:10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

1:11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

In this passage from Mark's gospel, the one who John the Baptist declared would baptize with the Holy Spirit and the one who is Living Water himself is baptized. The reason for his baptism is a bit of a mystery; but, the power of his baptism is unmistakable. The sacrament of baptism powerfully symbolizes new life in Christ! Baptism powerfully celebrates that we all belong because each of us has a place in the family of God. Just as the heaven tore open and the voice of God proclaimed at the baptism of Jesus that he was God's Beloved Son, so too God proclaims over and over again that we are beloved even when the world through its racist, classist, sexist, and oppressive words and actions would seek to declare the contrary. We belong to God—whether we live and witness acknowledging this fact or resist in rebellion or denial. We belong to

God—whether the world thinks we matter or not. We belong to God—in living and even in dying. This belonging, this relationship matters. Our love for God and our love for neighbor and self are rooted in this belonging. Our acts of compassion and justice are rooted in this beloved belonging.

On December 25, 1747, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, urged the Methodists to renew their covenant with God. Since then, Methodists at Watch Night services, on the First Sunday of the Year or toward its beginning, and at other occasions have participated in renewing their covenant, remembering their relationship with each other and their belonging to God.

The Wesley covenant prayer reads:

"I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share (write down)—Reflecting on the scripture and on the Wesley Covenant Prayer. Describe the power that comes from belonging and being called beloved.

PRAY:

At a time of civil unrest and attempted domestic terrorism in the USA and unrest and violence throughout the world, we pray *For Deliverance from National Sin* (AMEC Hymnal, #765)

Lord God Almighty, defend our land, we beseech you, from the secret power and the open shame of great national sins. From all dishonesty and civic corruption; from all vainglory and selfish luxury; from all cruelty and the spirit of violence; from covetousness which is idolatry; from impurity which defiles the temple of the Holy Spirit; and from intemperance which is the mother of many crimes and sorrows; good Lord, deliver and save us, and our children, and our children's children, in the land which you have blessed with the light of pure religion; through Jesus Christ, our only Savior and King. AMEN

ACT:

1. Based on your reflections from the TALK section, share stories, pictures, certificates, etc. of baptisms (yours or in your family). In this Season after the Epiphany, do what you can to show that we all belong together; help others and yourself by practicing social distancing as much as

possible, washing your hands often, and wearing face covering to help prevent the spread of COVID-19—See: <http://www.amechealth.org>.

2. See also the activity that accompanies this devotion.

3. Check out the liturgical color calendar: <https://ameced.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Liturgical-Colors-2021.pdf>

Song:

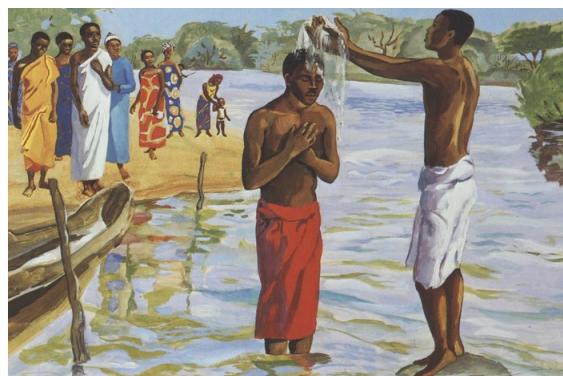
Spirit of the Living God
AMEC Hymnal, #619

Spir-it of the Liv-ing God, Fall fresh on me,
Spir-it of the Liv-ing God, Fall fresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, Fill me, use me.
Spir-it of the Liv-ing God, Fall fresh on me.

Alternative Song: *Wash, O God, Your Sons and Daughters* performed by Oleta Adams:
<https://youtu.be/0fPDFA8-Hjc>

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols (like a bowl of water to remind you of the waters of baptism) or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



Title: John baptizes Jesus

JESUS MAFA is a response to the New Testament readings from the Lectionary by a Christian community in Cameroon, Africa. Each of the readings was selected and adapted to dramatic interpretation by the community members. Photographs of their interpretations were made, and these were then transcribed to paintings.

The Christian Education Department will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.