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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

**Weekend of Sunday, January 10, 2021**  
**Baptism of Our Lord/Lectionary 1/Proper X/Year B**  
**First Reading: Genesis 1:1-5**  
**Second Reading: Acts 19:1-7**  
**Gospel Reading: Mark 1:4-11**  
**Sermon Title: “Expect the Holy Spirit”**

## **Theme**

*Mark’s gospel reports the story of Jesus’ baptism with some irony: the one on whom the Spirit descends is himself the one who will baptize others with the Holy Spirit.*

## **Text**

<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

## Sermon

**Introduction** ~ lights out except the Paschal Candle and font front/center.

You probably have never experienced a sermon like the one you are about to experience, at least not from me, nor have I heard of it being done. Perhaps I shouldn't even call it a sermon because it is going to take the form of corporate prayer, although I will be the one praying on behalf of us all. It is my hope that you will be praying along with me.

I have one concern, however, and that is that I am going to ask you to stay focused on the Paschal Candle as one of the two primary symbols of baptism, the other being the Font – [which, through the magic of digital editing will simply appear in a few moments](#). I am going to turn off the lights and lead the prayer from the Narthex so I don't become a distraction. Here is my concern, do you remember the old Philips light bulb commercial, where the instant the lights are turned out, you hear snoring? I'm going to turn out the lights so that you can focus on the Paschal Candle, not to encourage sleep. [Those of you worshiping at home might want to turn out the lights as well](#). If you try to stay focused I believe that you will have a rich experience.

So I encourage you to sit back and focus on the Paschal Candle.

## Sermon/Prayer

Lord God, in the Gospel Reading for today Mark simply brought Jesus on to the scene at his baptism by John. We are reminded that John's ministry was a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” He boldly proclaimed the truth and many who heard his message prepared for the coming of your messiah by confessing their sins and being washed clean, even in the dirty water of the Jordan River.

Jesus Christ, your own son, whose birth we just celebrated, was among those who turned out. He who knew no sin didn't need repentance and forgiveness. And yet he was baptized too, as a demonstration of his willingness to live the entire human experience. At his baptism, you affirmed him as your Son and your beloved, and even before his public ministry began, in him you were well pleased.

As he came out of the water of baptism, Jesus saw the Spirit descend like a dove on himself. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

How we long to hear and trust those words said about us; that we too are beloved and pleasing. And yet, if we are honest, we don't try to live into our baptized life that much. It is as if we do not expect the Holy Spirit to show up for us.

From his baptism on, Jesus went on to give himself as an example of the godly life through his ministry of preaching and teaching, and performing signs and miracles. In doing so, he affirmed the value of all people. He expected the Holy Spirit would be with him and it was.

We confess that we have not been good disciples. His preaching often falls on our deaf ears. His teaching often fails to bring change to the way we live our lives. His signs and miracles often impress us with his divine power, but we do not expect the Holy Spirit to show up for us. Yet you promised to send us an Advocate, help us to expect the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives anew that we might be changed by Christ's gospel.

Though the awareness of your total knowledge of us is frightening, it is only you who truly knows us. And despite our sinfulness, our brokenness, our failure to live up to the example of Jesus Christ, you love us. In our human-ness we find that hard to comprehend, but we thank you and praise you for your unconditional love. Help us to expect the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that we will desire to know you better.

You give us a good life and yet we aren't very thankful. The very air that we breathe is a gift from you and yet we take it for granted. Help us to expect the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that we are more thankful, more appreciative of your generosity.

You have taken care of all our needs to live from day to day, yet, in our foolishness, we waste time worrying, and use what we have been given foolishly. Help us to expect the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that we become better stewards of what you have first given us.

You have given us relationships to steward. We have neglected and mistreated them. You have put strangers in our paths and we have ignored them. Help us to expect the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that we see each other and the stranger as beloved of you and give them their due respect.

You have given each one of us spiritual gifts to be used by the body for the good of the body, and yet we come up with all kinds of excuses for why we can't. Help us to expect the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that we are inspired to be your arms and legs in ministry to all the world.

In preparation for the coming of your messiah, you sent John to preach a message of preparation. By the power of your Holy Spirit, many came and repented and were washed clean of their sinfulness. By John's baptism, those repentant people were given a new beginning.

Your Son Jesus was among those who were baptized by John and it was at his baptism that he began his public ministry. And it was through him that you revealed your true nature of love, grace, and mercy.

You created the first human family, Adam and Eve, out of love and you desired holy communion with them. You gave them the world to live in, and tend to, and all was good. But they chose to sin and strove for independence from you. We'd like to blame all our problems on them, but the truth is, we make the same decisions every day. Help us to expect the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that we make decisions grounded in your predestined plans for us.

Because you are holy and righteous, our sinfulness becomes an obstacle between ourselves and you. You can't bear to look upon our sinfulness. It would seem that holy communion with you is lost. And yet, obviously, for you, that was not acceptable.

You sent us Jesus, your own Son, your own flesh and blood, and at the conclusion of his earthly ministry, he gave himself, his own flesh and blood in exchange for our own. It is through his sin-forgiving death and life-giving resurrection that holy communion with you is once again a possibility. Help us to expect the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in this meal we share each time we gather.

After his earthly ministry was complete Jesus entrusted his mission and ministry to a few at first, but then to all who call him Lord of their lives. Just before his return to his rightful throne at your right hand in heaven where he rules over all that is, he commissioned his Church, his Bride, to continue teaching your values, and to baptize as the way we ritualize our adoption as your children. Help us to expect the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that we know what this ritual truly means and to honor it.

Lord God, we who are baptized have been washed clean of our sinfulness. These whom we baptize this weekend desire the same for themselves and for their children.

You do not treat us as we deserve but instead are compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love!

You have separated us from our sin as far as the east is from the west!

You have made us righteous, holy and blameless, whiter than snow!

The gate to holy communion with you, closed by sin, is once again open.

Create in us pure hearts O God, and renew our desire to live for you alone.

Remind us that we are not defined by our sinfulness, but by our baptism into Christ, and through our baptisms. Help us to expect the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

This we pray in the name of the crucified and risen one, Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.