

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

“(The Christ) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”

Luke 3: 16

At the end of Matthew’s Gospel right before Jesus ascends to his Father in heaven, he speaks to the disciples gathered around him. “Go out into the whole world and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” And that is precisely why we do what we do when we baptize anybody. We do what the Lord told us to do. We are obedient to the Word of God. We do not have the power to change what the Lord has placed upon us. The water may be poured or we may be immersed fully but there is always water and there are always the words given to us by Christ himself.

But often enough what gets overlooked is what John the Baptist said, in prophetic mode, about the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. So. The waters of baptism cleanse us of our sins. The waters renew our spirit and our soul. The waters give life. Water and life always go together in God’s creation and God’s new creation.

But the Holy Spirit? Why the Holy Spirit? Is the Holy Spirit necessary? Absolutely. Why? Because what God knows and what we all suspect is this: We are in the pit and we are living in the darkness and we cannot extricate ourselves and we cannot see clearly. We want to get out of the pit and we want to see clearly but we cannot and we do not. God sends precisely what we need to remedy these two realities that afflict us because of the handed on effect of sin.

God lifts us up from the abyss. God opens our eyes with enlightenment. God empowers us to live his way. The Spirit that animates Jesus Christ is the very same Spirit that is poured out on us. We need this Spirit because otherwise all we have is our own strength and our own talents and abilities. Not enough. Those who are wise know that this is true. Those drawn to folly think that they are all they really need. Not so. Not so, then. Not so, now. The Christ will baptize with the Holy Spirit and passionate love (fire). Can you ask the Lord to help you to realize this and feel it in your bones? That is the question of the week.