

November 13 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

Let There Be Light: A Study of FPC Stained-Glass Windows – The Baptism of Jesus

First Presbyterian Church has been blessed with parishioner memorial gifts of 15 beautiful stained-glass windows over the years, as summarized in the wonderful guide put together by Virginia Wiley in 1990, as part of the 175 year anniversary celebration of the church. The window of focus is the baptism of Jesus, located in the left back side of the sanctuary, facing the chancel, and framed in the upper medallion.

In the window, we see a beautiful pictorial of Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist as shared in Matthew 3:13-17. As with the previous windows, this window is bordered with leaves of green laurel symbolizing the triumph of eternal life and with leaves of golden oak signifying God's glory and strength. The upper medallion is framed in an ornate gold mandala, which symbolizes the everlasting life that God has given us in Christ Jesus through His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. On top of the circle frame rests an angel, robed in blue on a half shell, who is God's messenger of the Good News of His sacrificial love, saving grace, and everlasting hope sent from heaven that is present throughout our life's faith journey.

Within the mandala, the Triune God is displayed with God the Father pronouncing His favor on His Son in the white banner with gold backing, signifying Christ's purity and glory, *"this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased"*; the white dove descending from heaven with a nimbus of a gold cross, signifying the glory of God the Holy Spirit, whose beam of fire and light of Truth radiate from heaven to the Son, the Word made flesh, and to the world beyond; and God the Son, with a nimbus of red cross, the One who humbled and sacrificed Himself to the point of death in obedience to the Father, who baptizes with fire and the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist is clad in red tunic and purple robe representing the sacrifice and suffering that he is to see for the sake of his Lord, speaking truth against principalities and powers. His head is shrouded with a gold rim nimbus, a symbol of God's servant in His perfect plan, fulfilling his role as a prophet of the Most High, *"the voice crying out in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord"*. Off to the side are red roses symbolizing the crucifixion of our Lord as seen in the nail wounds in His hands and sword-pierced side. In the distance, the rose and purple of Elijah's Hill are seen, where Elijah ascended into heaven, signifying the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5-6, in God announcing that He would send *"Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord, "as John the Baptist is named in the Gospels' baptism accounts.*

While standing on green laurel leaves on the Jordan riverside, leading the way for the glory of the Savior. John the Baptist holds a crossed-staff mounted with a white and gold banner of the cross, signifying the sinless and pure Savior, who humbles Himself to a baptism that is for the sake of all those who come to believe in Him.

John pours the baptismal water from a half shell onto Jesus' head as Jesus stands in the flowing waters of the river Jordan, signifying the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry and symbolic of the words of *John 7:38: Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water"*.

All four of the Synoptic Gospels share the story of Jesus' baptism with the manifestation of the Triune God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as portrayed in the sanctuary stained-glass window. Each Gospel includes John the Baptist speaking of his unworthiness to baptize Jesus: *"I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals."* Unique to Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 3:15), John the Baptist tells Jesus,

"I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replies, *"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."* Matthew Henry comments that here Christ humbly submits Himself to John's baptism, 'looking upon it as well becoming Him to fulfil all righteousness, to own every Divine institution, and to show His readiness to comply with all God's righteous precepts. In and through Christ, the heavens are opened to the children of men.'

Mark's Gospel speaks of *"the heavens (schizo) torn apart"* as God's Holy Spirit descends like a dove. *'Schizo'* resonates with the prophecy of Isaiah, when Isaiah says to God (Isaiah 64:1), *"O that you would tear open the heavens and come down."* Mark and Luke similarly describe the moment on Good Friday when the curtain of the temple is torn in two. In Mark's judgment, the baptism of Jesus is so very clearly a radical act. In Jesus, God has committed the act of breaking into and entering the world and Mark wants the world to know.

Each Gospel speaks of John baptizing with water and Jesus as the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire. The use of the *mikvah*, or the Jewish ceremonial immersion in preferably flowing water, provides the background for New Testament baptism. The word *mikvah* comes from the same Hebrew root word as *hope*, used in Jeremiah 17:13: *"O Lord, the hope (Mikveh) of Israel, all who forsake You will be put to shame. Those who turn away on earth will be written down, because they have forsaken the fountain of living water, even the Lord."*

When John was baptizing and preaching repentance, those who responded were admitting that they were "unclean." This seems to be why John objected so strongly to baptizing Jesus and why the Pharisees refused to be baptized. Likewise, Christian baptism is understood against this background as in Acts 2:37-38: *"Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

The story of John the Baptist and Jesus unfolds in the Gospel of John. The day after His baptism, John the Baptist acknowledges Jesus as *"The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* and as *"God's Chosen One,"* while stating that the sole purpose of his ministry was that Jesus might be revealed to Israel as the Messiah. That same day, two of John's disciples, the Apostles Andrew and John, asked Jesus, *"where are you staying?"* Jesus' response was, *"Come and you will see."* Thus John's ministry and its purpose nears its completion as Jesus' public ministry begins.

Later, as John continues to baptize, his followers point out that Jesus is also *"baptizing and everyone is going to him."* John humbly responds *'as a friend of the bridegroom who attends and hears his voice': "That joy is mine and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less."* (John 3:30)

Later in *Matthew 11:2-15*, we read of John the Baptist's doubt while he is in prison, sending his disciples to ask Jesus: *"Are you the one who is to come or should we expect someone else?"* Jesus tells his disciples to go back and tell John of all the miracles that have occurred along with a word of assurance, *"Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."* Then Jesus speaks to the crowd, paying tribute to his cousin John, the one who jumped while in his mother's womb as the Virgin Mary, who was pregnant with the Christ Child, shared her Good News with her cousin Elizabeth:

"A prophet? Yes, and I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' Truly I tell you among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he... And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah, who was to come. Whoever has ears let them hear."

Baptism is one of two sacraments of the Presbyterian Church, the other being communion. As Christians we are called to remember our baptism. Baptism is an indispensable part of Christian life, Christian identity, and the Church's mission, as shared on the PCUSA website:

Baptism is an indispensable part of Christian life:

Romans 6:3-4:

So don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We therefore were buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Baptism is an indispensable part of Christian identity:

Galatians 3:27-28

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Baptism is an indispensable part of the Church's Mission:

Matthew 28-19

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

A song to reflect and pray on:

[\(1062\) Zach Williams - Baptized \(Official Audio\) - YouTube](#)

Looking ahead – Sunday November 20

Third Window on Left Back Side Facing Chancel (Lower Medallion) – William Tyndale