

John the Baptist's whole life has been about preparing the way of the Lord. Preparing the way for Jesus to come into the world. From inside his mother's womb he leapt with joy simply being close to Mary while she was pregnant with Jesus. Mary's first preparation in birthing Jesus, was her witnessing Elizabeth giving birth to John the Baptist. From the very beginning he's been preparing the way.

John the Baptist is an interesting fellow. He was really hairy and I imagine kind of smelled. He lived in the woods and lived off the land. He hunted and fished and wore animal hides as clothes. He ate locust and wild honey. He wasn't a civilized cityman. And everyone in town probably thought he was a little off his rocker.

Yet even as a well known "off his rocker" type person, people were listening to him and believing him. What he spoke of was truth. He had answers. He had a connection with God, and with Jesus. People even thought he was the one they had been waiting for. And with this gathering of people, John's preaching career ended on this day. He always knew he was there to set

everything up for Jesus and that a day would come when Jesus would surpass him.

That day when John baptized Jesus, John knew his task was done. He had achieved his goal, his purpose in life. John goes on to be imprisoned by Herod. But this act of baptising Jesus is a vital part of the life of Jesus, it's a pivotal moment in Jesus' life. While this act marks the end of John's ministry, this act marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was baptized, in Luke's words, with "all the people". This is Jesus again being fully human, realizing he needs the gift of the Holy Spirit and has to acquire that prior to setting out on his ministry.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is multifaceted. It links all of us together, to the one body. The Spirit, she fills us with the authority of God, with our intuitions and our gifts. The Spirit is an essential element of Christianity.

These people John was baptizing were looking for a leader. They were looking for someone to come and save them. And there are times I feel just like them. There are times I look at our world <mass shooting, suicide rates

escalading, local and worldwide human trafficking stats, earthquakes and wildfires> and I look for a leader, someone who can save us. There are times I look at the big picture church <at people condemning others, at protests even against our countries veterans, at church after church closing their doors, at pastor after pastor burning out> and I look for a leader, someone who can save us. There are times in my professional career <when I don't get around to everything on my to-do list, when I felt I said the wrong thing, when the sermon just isn't good, when I just don't feel worthy> and I look for a leader, someone who can save me. There are times in my personal life <when my house is a mess, laundry is piled up, I can't remember if I've already fed the dog, I didn't check to see what time I put the food in the oven> and I look for a leader, someone who can save me.

Throughout my life I've felt both close to God and far from God. I love feeling in tune. If I am, I try to stay there. And if I'm not, I try to get back there. For me, I try various forms of prayer. I might try journaling. Or holding people in the light (it's where I close my eyes and I imagine the person I'm praying for standing there and then this huge radiant beam of light shines down on them and they receive the light, it's good positive

energy and love from God sent their way). I might try to do a never ending prayer where I constantly go throughout my day talking to God. The hardest for me is when I try listening to God. I can close my eyes. I can take time to focus on controlling my breathing. But then trying not to have anything in my mind and simply sit in God's presence and listen to God. It's hard. I've even tried the cheesy tricks like having a train come by and carry away whatever I start thinking about.

An important part of Luke's story here is the focus on prayer. Jesus is baptized and immediately goes into prayer and during that prayer receives the Holy Spirit. Our prayer life is important. It's one way we not only connect ourselves to God, but it's a way to be filled by the Holy Spirit, so we can go out and be love and light. So we can go out and give people a reason to have hope and joy.

As I've gotten older I realize more the value of connectedness to others. I used to think that if I had nothing to say there was no real point in calling someone. But now I know that simply calling someone and saying hi or asking how their day went, tells them I love and care about them. Even if

it's only a two minute call, they know I care. And that's how God is. God wants us to reach out, even if it's a quick check in. Because it reminds God we haven't forgotten about God. That God is still important to us and a part of our lives. It reminds us what our focus and priority is in life, what centers us and gives us life.

When things are indescribable we use the words that we know that are familiar and similar to express what we see, how we feel. Luke says the Holy Spirit is in bodily form, so it's something you can see, perhaps something you could touch. Yet it descends down like a dove. How that tangible form comes down is indescribable. That's true for the feeling a lot of us experienced at our own baptisms.

How were you called to baptism? How were you called to do the ministries you do? This is a day we set aside to remember each year on the Baptism of the Lord our own stories of baptism. Remembering how old you were. What city you were in. What body of water you entered into. The temperature of the water. Remembering why you chose to say yes. And how you felt afterward. These are the things we remember this day.

We take a breath in and remind ourselves that the Living Spirit is among us and in us. As we feel the water today prior to sitting at Table, we are reminded what God said to each of us on the day of our baptism, that we need to hear again, “You are my child, whom I love, and with you I am well pleased.”