

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

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

If being a Christian were a crime, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

So what did you think when I asked that question? If you had to produce evidence what would you do? Call the church office and ask for the records of your receiving Holy Communion? Would you count on the record of your contributions as testimony to your faith in Christ? Would you tell of your good deeds, how you help those who need help? Or would you show evidence of how you have served in the church, the responsibilities that you have carried? Is your prayer life evidence of faith in God? Or is it your witnessing to Christ in inviting others to faith that makes clear your faith? Would those who have joined you in Bible Study testify of your believing in Christ? Or those in your home? Among some Christians speaking in tongues is considered strong evidence, among others making a decision for Christ is the mark of a Christian. What about you?

When Martin Luther struggled against doubts and fears of rejection by God, Martin declared to himself, "I am baptized." For him baptism was God declaring Martin to be a Christian. Is a baptismal certificate all the evidence we ever need?

"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." When the heavens were split open and the silence of God was broken these are the words Jesus heard. "You are my Son whom I love, with you I am pleased."

So what did Jesus do? Ask for a certificate and hang it on the wall and wait to be saved? No, this Spirit from heaven thrust Jesus into a life of healing and teaching and giving himself. From this moment on Jesus was caught up in the work God was calling him to do. John's baptism had been about repentance but the heavens being split and the

Spirit coming into Jesus were about ministry. God was at work in this life, in every thought and word and deed. Is what the Holy Spirit is doing any different today?

God is at work in you. That is what your baptism means. God is at work in you. God's Spirit entered into your life to lead you to a life that will bring God pleasure. God's Spirit is working in you to grow fruits that will bring God joy. God's Spirit is at work in you so that the words and work of Jesus might be carried on in the year 2006 in your life.

Sometimes I get all of this confused. Sometimes I think God is interested in my happiness, interested in seeing that I get the things I want. Certainly my prayers can lead me in this direction as I place before God requests for the world to be the way I want it to be. But as any wise parent knows love is not about giving children what they think will make them happy. God knows what I and my neighbors need – in Jesus we see how God giving the world what the world needs looks like.

It looks like Jesus raising a widow's son from the dead.

It looks like Jesus teaching us not to be anxious about our food and clothing but to trust that God will provide.

It looks like a great crowd being fed with five loaves and two fish.

It looks like a demon possessed man in chains being set free.

It looks like the Son of God giving his life on the cross for sinners.

And in your life – what does it look like when God is giving the world what the world needs?

It looks like your listening to another person, looking her in the eyes – hearing.

It looks like your voting in ways that will bring good and justice for all people.

It looks like your helping to teach children and visiting those who are old.

It looks like your sharing – not hoarding in fear but sharing generously with those who have little.

When the Spirit descended upon Jesus that day the first thing that happened was that the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness. He was there for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts and the angels

waited on him. The Spirit of God does not always lead us to a life of ease or a life that is safe. Sometimes there is danger in helping others, sometimes a cross. But God will not forsake you. Angels waited on Jesus. God provided through the time of temptation.

God provides for you - faith, love, guidance – salvation - when you stumble, forgiveness. But all the while God's Spirit is working in you to carry out God's work today.