

Worship Resources - Possessed / <https://youtu.be/LqDSOYuNpF8>

1st Sunday after Epiphany, Year B,

10th January, 2021

Acts 19:1-7 CEV / Mark 1:4-11 CEV

Prelude

Brighten The Corner Where You Are

music by Charles H. Gabriel

played by church musician Annie Center

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxUcvfagDo0>

Intro / Call to Worship

The heavens open. The Spirit descends.

Jesus emerges from the water.

And a voice echoes through the blue expanse.

"This is my child, the Beloved, with whom I am well-pleased."

Jesus is named. Claimed.

We come to the water. We remember we are named. Claimed.

Can it be so? What a thing to be named. Claimed.

Let us worship the one who names and claims us still.

I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

As we gather today for this first Sunday of Epiphany, let's take a moment to reflect on what baptism means to us as we listen to this beautiful song performed by Kenny Chesney and Randy Travis.

Reflection Video *Kenny Chesney & Randy Travis - Baptism*

Performed by Kenny Chesney & Randy Travis

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IW_oBgbvROg

Invocation

Creating, Calling, and Faithful God, we come to this time and place to be with you, to worship you, and to learn from you. May our time together be like your creation of light in the darkness that you called good. May it be that you would call us good while we respond to your call and as we listen to you. **Amen.**

We light a candle today to represent the Spirit burning within us, and among us, guiding our time together. (light candle) Amen.

In our reading from Acts today, Paul highlights the importance of being baptized by the Spirit. As we hear these words, let's reflect on our own experience, and how we feel the influence of the Spirit in our lives.

Scripture Reading **Acts 19:1-7 CEV**

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled across the hill country to Ephesus, where he met some of the Lord's followers.

He asked them, "When you put your faith in Jesus, were you given the Holy Spirit?"

"No!" they answered. "We have never even heard of the Holy Spirit."

"Then why were you baptized?" Paul asked.

They answered, "Because of what John taught."^[a]

Paul replied, "John baptized people so that they would turn to God. But he also told them that someone else was coming, and that they should put their faith in him. Jesus is the one that John was talking about."

After the people heard Paul say this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Then Paul placed his hands on them. The Holy Spirit was given to them, and they spoke unknown languages and prophesied.

There were about twelve men in this group.

Scripture Video ***Acts 19:1-7 Baptized In The Name Of Jesus***

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-3vjO5a1SE>

A Time of Prayer

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a specific request to be included in our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at: vicarglenn@gmail.com, and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.

Joys and Concerns

This morning we remember Jana Helmuth and her family with the passing of her mother this week. May they find comfort and strength through God's presence in their lives.

We are also grateful for the blessing of God's healing presence among several members of our congregation who have weathered mild cases of COVID-19 in the past month.

Let us lift up Myrna Latschaw in our prayers as well, as she prepares for surgery.

Finally, let us remember our leaders this morning. May God work in their lives to make the right choices to ensure our safety and freedom from oppression, modeling the teachings of Jesus in the choices they make.

Let's bring these concerns and others in our lives to God together in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

God,

as we move forward into a new year, we ask you to bless all for whom the year is not being looked forward to. We think of people who are ill and fearful of what the year will bring. We think of all who have family difficulties and are concerned as to how to solve them.

We think of all for whom the new year is bringing money problems, and all who are fearful for their jobs.

God, for us all the future is unknown—help us to have the faith to trust in you, the wisdom to do the right thing, and to be guided by you constantly.

Remind us, God, that you always keep your promises; remind us too that they are kept in your time and not ours.

We ask your blessing on all who have turned their back on You; or who have not known You. May they hear your word and respond to your love

Be with those who are lost, who have never known you. Help them to seek and find the peace and love found in you and you alone.

Loving God—we, your children, pray to you And give you thanks and praise through the name of your beloved Son, Christ Jesus our Lord.

We bring before you our loved ones, and in the silence we pray for them.

For our family, our friends, for all whom we know. May this year be good for all whom we love,

God, guide us in our lives. May others see your love shine through us. May our words and actions constantly point to you; may we put You first in everything and serve You always.

We ask you to be with us and give us a year where we know and feel and are guided by your presence.

Whatever the year holds may we never lose sight of you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

In our gospel lesson this morning, we hear the story of Jesus' baptism and reception of the Spirit from above. As we listen to these words from Mark, let's reflect on how we seek and experience the Spirit in our own lives, and our lives together.

Gospel Lesson Mark 1:4-11 CEV

So John the Baptist showed up in the desert and told everyone, “Turn back to God and be baptized! Then your sins will be forgiven.”

From all Judea and Jerusalem crowds of people went to John. They told how sorry they were for their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan River.

John wore clothes made of camel’s hair. He had a leather strap around his waist and ate grasshoppers and wild honey.

John also told the people, “Someone more powerful is going to come. And I am not good enough even to stoop down and untie his sandals.[a]

I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!”

About that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River.

As soon as Jesus came out of the water, he saw the sky open and the Holy Spirit coming down to him like a dove.

A voice from heaven said, “You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you.”

Scripture Video *Mark 1:4-11 | Jesus Revealed As God's Servant*
Lectionary bible reading

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJ7C_LFFMug

Message – Possessed

In our gospel lesson this morning, we have the story of John the Baptist performing his ministry in the wilder places of Judea, and the rather rough and austere life he led..But in short order, we have a new character introduced in the story. Jesus is here, taking his turn with the crowd to be baptized by John. It’s an interesting turn of events, as John has made it known that there will be one after him who he is not worthy to untie the sandals of. Yet there is no indication of recognition, of special treatment for Jesus in Mark’s Gospel. He simply goes forward as anybody else would

have that day, and is baptized. John doesn't give him any VIP treatment, nor does Jesus seek it. Like the others, Jesus is seeking the cleansing ritual that the regular crowd was there for.

Which can give pause for thought, especially for theologians who like to spend a lot of time thinking about the minute details of gospel stories. What did Jesus need to be cleansed of? If he is God incarnate, then why would he need to repent and be baptized? Was there a point he was simply human? It's a concept called adoptionism, which you can feel free to do more research on should you feel the need to be scholarly and theological. While I could spend all my time analyzing that concept, what is more important is the next element of the story. As John predicted, we have the arrival of the Holy Spirit in this scene. God is actively present and at work.

Mark's gospel has a different tone than the other gospels with regards to God's presence. In this first section of Mark, all of the verbs associated with God are active. "Heavens are torn open; Spirit is descending; a voice comes out of heaven" while Jesus' actions are passive, almost like he's a spectator in the scene, "he came; was baptized; he saw." Clearly Mark is emphasizing the active work of God in the world with the arrival of Jesus. God is no longer some distant deity we seek to beg and plead with like the Psalmist, to do something in the world. God is in the here and now, making change and doing stuff. This is a story about God's work in the here and now. We have the Spirit descending like a dove and dwelling in Jesus. Wherever we come out on his divinity prior to this, the implication now is the Divine is at work in Jesus. There's a sense of Divine possession at work.

Mark's Gospel has been compared by various writers as being a series of exorcisms, as there are multiple occurrences of Jesus commanding spirits, demons, and illnesses to "come out" of those they have possessed. But Jesus' baptism reads like a reverse exorcism, with the possession of the "Spirit," a divine occupation. Any human influence or orientation is now replaced by the leading of the Spirit. This single event caused a dramatic shift in the life and ministry of Jesus. By all accounts, it is likely he lived a relatively ordinary human life to this point. There is not much written of his life prior to this moment. This single act kicks off his active ministry and his recruitment of disciples. The possession of the Holy moves him to act.

There's a story of a young man who asked an old rich man how he made his money. The old guy fingered his worsted wool vest and said, "Well, son, it was 1932, the depth of the Great Depression. I was down to my last nickel. I invested that nickel in an apple. I spent the entire day polishing the apple and, at the end of the day, I sold

the apple for ten cents. The next morning, I invested those ten cents in two apples. I spent the entire day polishing them and sold them at 5:00 PM for 20 cents. I continued this system for a month, by the end of which I'd accumulated a fortune of \$3.50. Then he paused, and added, then my wife's father died and left us ten million dollars." That's how the Spirit works in our lives.

We can work as hard as we want, but we will never accomplish all that God has planned for us without the work of the Spirit. We come from a fiercely independent culture, with a can-do attitude that spurs us into thinking that we make our own destiny. But there's a difference between the world we make on our own and one that's made in conjunction with God. We often measure our success in stuff: in dollars and cents, in the car we drive or the house we live in. But that's certainly not the only scale we use. Many can also measure success in relationships:

a successful marriage, successful children, grandchildren, etc. We also take pride in what we do together. Donations we raise to help others and initiatives to assist those in need are lofty achievements. But where does God fit into all that? How is the Spirit a part of those milestones as individuals, and as a community of faith?

N T Wright, the famous New Testament scholar talks about the task of Christians in the world. He says, "Many say, 'Oh yes, the Holy Spirit came in his place to live in us.' Yes, but for what purpose? The Holy Spirit came to empower us to be God's life in the world. We are to do the work of God in the world. We are to be God to the world. And we cannot do that alone. The church is God's redemptive community in the world. Without you, and without you joined with God's other children, God's work will not be done. He will not do it for us."

In our own baptism, however we experience that, we are possessed by that same force. It's through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit that we experience our greatest achievements. Yet do we pay attention to that "still small voice" in the back of our heads? That voice that sometimes suggests actions that don't make sense to our worldly logic. To the values of our worldly culture, to what the powers and principalities of this world tell us is important? Do we let that voice lead us, or do we tamp it down to do the more "sensible" thing?

When the Spirit descended on Jesus, the heavens were literally torn open. God was beginning the process of making all things new. In order to make things new implies that we stop doing things as we've always done them. That we stop living by the priorities of the empire and start living by the ways of God.

The last week's events certainly illustrate that we cannot rely on the false security worldly empires provide. In order to fully join with God's work in this world, it's vital that we allow ourselves to be possessed by the Spirit, allowing our actions, thoughts, and speech to be led by that force, that feeling that leads us down paths we never would choose on our own. Like the agitator in a washing machine, the Holy Spirit shakes us up and helps us to shed the dirt and grime we acquire from a worldly life, and turns us in a different direction. We might find ourselves talking to someone we'd never consider talking to, or showing kindness to someone whose very mannerisms are the opposite of what we've been taught is acceptable. We might find ourselves changing how we spend our money, our time, and our talents, focusing outward instead of inward. We might even find ourselves changing how we worship together, being open to new and exciting ways of celebrating our faith together.

The Spirit can be compared to sparkling water when you pour it in a glass. The bubbles churn and rise in the glass. This is what happens when we open ourselves to possession by the Spirit. God bubbles up and permeates every aspect of our lives. And this is what happens when we focus on our own priorities and rely solely on ourselves. The water stays flat and tepid.

Do we want to be the Christians who are actively excitingly effervescent, or do we want to stay tepid, calm and controlled, slowly growing dank and swampy? It all boils down to whether we choose possession by the world, or by God's spirit. The choice is ours to make and I pray for our sake, and the world's, that we make the right one. Amen.

Call to Serve.

As we continue to seek to be a place of compassion and support to our community, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or online donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry that seeks to promote the growth of God's shalom around us. This morning, as Annie shares the following song, let's give some thought how we can seek to be possessed by your Spirit in every aspect of our daily lives, in everything we say and do as your servants and your church in this world.

A Time for Reflection

Reflection on the Word [video]

Oh, Beautiful Star of Bethlehem,

Music: R. Fisher Boyce, 1940;
harmonized by Adger M. Pace,
played by church musician Annie Center
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<https://youtu.be/WzE4BRjO3IA>

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Generous God, We give you thanks and praise and we dedicate to you our offering. In this we also dedicate the workings of our hands, the thinking of our minds, and the loving of our hearts. May each be used for the glory of your kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

Blessing/Assurance

Go in peace; love and care for one another in the name of Christ;
and may the Spirit of God which filled John and Jesus,
fill your hearts, souls and minds;
may the power of God which upheld them,
strengthen you for each day;
and may the love of God which directed their every action
be your guiding light and your shining star,
both now and forevermore. **Amen**

As we extinguish this candle, carry its divine spark into your lives this week, sharing God's love and light with all you encounter. Amen.

Postlude

Worship Lord In The Beauty

performed by church musician Annie Center,

<https://youtu.be/Us4rBZomtQU>