



GC2 equipper

December 2009
Volume 4, Issue 12
www.GCI.org/MinDev

The monthly ministry development newsletter of Grace Communion International

Dear worshipper of God:



The fall-winter worship events of the Christian calendar are joy and hope-filled reminders of God's love for all humanity.

Advent (meaning *coming*), reminds us that, in love, God *has come, is coming, and shall come* to us in the person of Jesus, our Savior. Advent services are held on four consecutive Sundays (starting this year with November 29), and ending with (or followed by) a Christmas themed service.

Epiphany (meaning *revealing*), reminds us that the loving Savior who comes to us is the Son of God incarnate—God and humanity united in the person of Jesus. Epiphany services are held the Sunday prior to the day of Epiphany (which every year falls on January 6). Epiphany services focus on the revealing of Jesus to the world—typically highlighting the visit of the Magi to honor the infant Jesus, or the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River. Both events reveal profound truths concerning Jesus' identity.

As a help in preparing for Epiphany, this issue highlights the significance of Jesus' baptism. For additional help in preparing for Advent and Epiphany, see the ***Trinitarian Worship*** blog at <http://trinitarianworship.blogspot.com/>.

Your friends in *Church Administration and Development* want to say how much we have enjoyed serving with you this year in Jesus' ministry. We wish you, your family, and your congregation a joyous Christmas and a blessed New Year!

In Jesus' service,
Dan Rogers

P.S. Please note that we have posted a revised ***Pastoral Continuing Education Program*** document (with expanded CEU catalog) at GCI.online (look under *pastor resources*).

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1 Advent & Epiphany celebrations

2 Epiphany: the baptism of Jesus

Epiphany: the baptism of Jesus

Epiphany celebrates the presentation of Jesus to the world in ways that reveal his identity as the divine-human Savior of all humankind. In the Gospels, a climactic moment of this revealing occurs at Jesus' baptism.

Jesus is about 30 years old, and his public ministry is about to begin (Luke 3:23). His cousin, John the Baptist, announces the Messiah's coming and urges fellow Jews to respond by being baptized to signify repentance and forgiveness of sin (Mark 1:4). Upon hearing of John's message, Jesus responds by leaving his home in Galilee, traveling to the Jordan River, and submitting himself to John's baptism.

Why does Jesus, the sinless Savior, seek baptism? Gerald Hawthorne answers in "The Presence and the Power, the significance of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus" (*Word*, 1991; pp. 120-121):

[Jesus] stands with...a sinful people in need of a genuine act of repentance. Jesus, in coming to be baptized with John's baptism, is not unlike Daniel, a man of God, himself above reproach (Dan. 6:4), but who at a time of national crisis fell on his knees before God and made his confession to God as if he were as much at fault as his people. He prayed: "We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled...We have sinned against thee. [Yet] to the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness" (Dan 9:3-9, italics mine).

...Matthew alone notes that John tried to persuade Jesus not to be baptized by him. "I need to be baptized by you," he objects, "And you come to me?" Jesus' reply was simply, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:14; 15). He meant by these words, "I am come to you for baptism because this is what any right-minded person would do in this situation. Israel as a whole needs to repent. I claim membership in this nation. Therefore, I too, as one with them must heed your call to repent and with them demonstrate corporate contrition by submitting to your baptism."

Hawthorne notes that while inferring Jesus' *divinity*, his baptism points specifically and primarily to his *humanity*. We see this in three events that accompany Jesus' baptism:

- First, the heavens are "torn open" (Mark 1:10). The language is cosmological—the barrier between heaven and earth; between divine and human, has been breached! Jesus' ministry to save is advancing! The ancient prayer asking God to "rend the heavens and come down...to make your name known" has been decisively answered (see Isa. 64:1-2)!
- Second, the Spirit descends on Jesus in "bodily form" (Luke 3:23a) "like a dove" (3:22). Why a dove? Apparently, because it's associated with Old Testament imagery—at creation (Gen. 1:2), and at the delivery of the world from the judgment of Noah's flood (Gen. 8:8-12). Now the Spirit is involved with Jesus in *new creation*—and the Spirit comes upon Jesus in a way unlike any person before. The man Jesus, uniquely, is "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1).
- Third, from heaven comes the reassuring voice of the Father, declaring to Jesus, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22b). These words echo Psalm 2:7 and Isa. 42:1. Though other people have been called "God's son," never before has one been called God's "beloved [*only*] Son." With these words, Jesus is shown to be God's *unique* son—the one who has a special and unparalleled relationship with the Father. With Jesus, the Father is "well pleased," a phrase which means that the Father takes "great delight" in Jesus. For all eternity, the Father has taken great delight in his divine Son. Now at his baptism, the Father bears witness that Jesus is, indeed, that Son.

At his baptism, Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, steps forward and, on behalf of us all, is anointed by the Spirit and commissioned by the Father for his ministry (see Acts 10: 37-38). A new day has dawned. God is here! Let us rejoice!

