

**- Saint John's Pulpit (January 10, Baptism of the Lord)
- "Grow in the Holy Spirit" Acts 19:1-7**

19 While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. ² He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³ Then he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." ⁴ Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied— ⁷ altogether there were about twelve of them.

Why Am I So Excited?

Let me tell about what happened this past Monday evening. It was the first day of Monday Virtual Bible Study this new year. The study deals with Max Lucado's Bible series, JESUS. The greatest joy from the study was that Nauman who became St. John's new member recently joined it!

As he strongly wants to be baptized, I began to think about his baptism education. I know that he needs not only his baptism education, but also his fellowship with St. John's congregations, so I suggested him to join this new year's Bible Study. Very thankfully, Nauman joined this Monday Bible study and enjoyed it with some other church friends.

The first lesson we studied this Monday night was about the birth of Jesus including Joseph, Mary, King Herod and the Magi. Indeed, we Christians know all these things very well. But Nauman's sharing made us see those who need what we know. At the end of the study, Nauman shared his feedback / reflection saying that "I am very happy to know about Jesus. This study helps me a lot although I need to study more."

There are those who don't know...

Yes, on that night, we all were very pleased to hear the wonderful testimony from Nauman. At the same time, it made all of us know that there are people who don't know about Jesus, and there are lots of things to do for those people by church and Christians.

In that sense, the text today gives us a good perspective why we need to share the truth with people. Apostle Paul is now at Ephesus. He meets some disciples there and found that these disciples had no idea about the Holy Spirit and what does it mean to be baptized by Jesus.

Presumably, these disciples were from John the Baptist and they had no chance to meet Jesus Christ. They might hear about Jesus and what He did. Accordingly, they identified themselves as disciples of Jesus although they were under John the Baptist and his influence.

² He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³ Then he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." Acts 19:2-3 NRSV

To these people, Paul felt that he needs to let them know about Jesus' Baptism with the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Acts 19:4-5 NRSV

Do you know this? Handling wrong belief is much harder than handling non-belief! In the story today, those who were influenced by John the Baptist looked good but had no idea about the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ.

If so, what about us? Although we identify ourselves as good Christians, but if we have no Jesus in us... what is a difference between those people in the story and us in this place?

Presumably, one of big challenges in Paul's ministry was to correct wrong beliefs. Evangelizing and outreaching bring lots of joy and satisfaction, but correcting wrong beliefs always has a potential debate and conflict.

From John's Baptism to Jesus' Baptism

Here, let's take a moment to double check a meaning of baptism by John the Baptist which is in Mark 1:4.

⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Mark 1:4 NRSV

Of course, I highly value John's baptism. Especially in the first stage of faith life, we need to repent, know that we are sinners, and look for forgiveness. However, the Bible clearly says there is one more baptism after John's baptism which means we need to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

⁷ He 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. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Mark 1:7-8 NRSV

Why do you think Jesus' baptism is so important? It means our growth and maturity in Christ. John's baptism requires us to repent for forgiveness. But Jesus wants us to please God through becoming his beloved child! Do you remember the voice from Heaven when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist?

¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Mark 1:11 NRSV

The point is this. Our starting point is from John's baptism, but our final goal is experiencing the Holy Spirit through Jesus' baptism. How? It looks complicated but may be simple. It is to 'love' our neighbors and share 'joy' with others through the name of Jesus Christ!

John's baptism requires our confession of sin for forgiveness. But Jesus' baptism encourages us to forgive others just as he did! This is what Jesus' baptism means. Also this is what we really need in our life and our country now.

Please look at the world, community, and society now. Don't you think that all things around us are asking us to seek for Jesus' baptism seriously? This world is full of blames, criticism, and conflicts. But don't you think that we Christians need to bring joy and love to the world? Don't you think that churches are the very places where people find forgiveness and freedom in Christ?

Holy Proliferation : Altogether there were about twelve of them

What is the end of this story? Apostle Paul taught them about Jesus' name and baptized them in the name of Jesus. Although it was from Paul's wonderful work, but we need to highly recognize those unnamed disciples that accepted Jesus' name. They needed courage to correct what they've believed, and they had to explore to the unknown area in their faith life. Let me read Acts 19:5-7 again:

⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied— ⁷ altogether there were about twelve of them. Acts 19:5-7 NRSV

The last verse is very interesting –“altogether there were about twelve of them.” We have no idea who they were. However, one sweet and joyful assumption is possible. God used another twelve disciples full of the Holy Spirit for His Kingdom!

Although the world is remaining at the level of John's baptism, but let's do our best to let the world know Jesus and one more baptism through His Holy Name. Let's share love with others and let them know joy in Christ. Growing in the Holy Spirit and finding joy through Christian love... these are signs for those who be baptized by Jesus the Lord.