

**Opening Prayer**

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

**Genesis 1:1-5**

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup>the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup>Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

**Commentary**

God began creative work by bringing order out of chaos, form out of confusion. A wind (*ruach*) from God was moving over the water. The sweeping wind suggests a fresh wind blowing out stale air and bringing in fresh air. The idea of movement has purpose, direction, and meaning. God was present and the activity was creative. In Hebrew thought, speaking is not just making sound, but has the capacity to bring about what is spoken. When God speaks, things really happen. This metaphor also reminds us that creation is not an accident. It is an expression of God’s will and purpose. In the Bible, light is a symbol of life and salvation. There is a sense in which each morning is a kind of new creation. The darkness/chaos of each night is dispelled by the first rays of the morning sun as it comes creeping over the horizon, with brightness and warmth following.

**Reflection**

1. Consider the two approaches of science and religion. How do you reconcile these two approaches to investigating the meaning of the cosmos?
2. Reflect on those times in your own life when God has brought light into darkened places and order out of chaos.

**Acts 19:1-7**

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup>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.”

<sup>3</sup>Then he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John’s baptism.”

<sup>4</sup>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.” <sup>5</sup>On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup>When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—<sup>7</sup>altogether there were about twelve of them.

### **Commentary**

Although Paul and Apollos were not coworkers, they were partners in ministry. They appealed to different people. Paul was a former Pharisee who had been converted to radical Christianity. Because he now saw what had come before as unimportant, Paul clashed with other leaders and disciples who were convinced that a Christian still needed to observe Jewish customs. Apollos was a Jewish Christian from a Hellenistic background. Apollos and Paul had basic disagreements but were able to work together in mutual purpose and Christian love. Ephesus was a major commercial seaport with government and imperial cult headquarters located there. In Ephesus Paul met some Christians who only knew the baptism of John the Baptist. These disciples were likely followers of John who then had turned to following Jesus. Paul saw their faith experience as incomplete. They had not received the Holy Spirit. So Paul taught them in this new way, and then he baptized them. John’s baptism had been for repentance. Christian baptism is a rite of initiation into the life and kingdom of the Messiah. When Paul laid hands on these believers, they received the Holy Spirit.

### **Reflection**

1. Are there ways in which you feel that your faith and experience are “incomplete”? What could you do to improve?

2. Consider the person and work of the Holy Spirit. How have you received the Holy Spirit, and how do you live out that experience daily?

### **Mark 1:4-11**

<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And 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. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>And 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. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

## Commentary

John the Baptist came preaching a baptism of repentance – but not just repentance in general. John wanted people to repent because the Messiah was coming, and he wanted people to be ready. The official word in Israel was that prophecy had ceased at the time of Ezra (around 400 B.C.). So John's appearance was a revival of the prophetic movement. The description of John sounds like the description of Elijah in 2 Kings 1:8. The tie with Elijah is important because the Book of Malachi had said that God would send Elijah before the day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5). John's baptism was a one-time event, a reorientation of a person's life in that moment. It marked the baptized person as one of God's chosen who was leaving behind the sins of the past and making a fresh start and who was committed to welcoming the coming Messiah. John was building a community that was ready for the reign of God. So why was the sinless Jesus baptized for repentance? He was choosing to associate himself with this gathering of God's chosen who were obedient. The most basic reality of the Christian faith is the Incarnation – the faith that in Jesus Christ God entered the world in human form to identify with all humanity. So By being baptized, Jesus identified himself with our sinfulness and need for repentance. The miraculous and supernatural signs surrounding the baptism of Jesus are all affirmations of who Jesus is – God's beloved Son.

## Reflection

1. In what ways are you identified as a Christian? What marks you as a disciple? Are you satisfied with the status quo? If not, what actions should you undertake?
2. Think about persons who impress you as believers? What is it about their life and/or actions that stands out? What might you learn from their example?

## Responsive Psalm

## Psalm 29

<sup>1</sup>Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

<sup>2</sup>**Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy splendor.**

<sup>3</sup>The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over mighty waters.

<sup>4</sup>**The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.**

<sup>5</sup>The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

<sup>6</sup>**He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox.**

<sup>7</sup>The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire.

<sup>8</sup>**The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.**

<sup>9</sup>The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all say, "Glory!"

<sup>10</sup>**The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever.**

<sup>11</sup>**May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!**

### **Closing Prayer**

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**