**First Reading Isaiah 43:1-7**

*Near the end of Israel’s exile in Babylon, God promises to bring the people home. They need no longer be afraid, because the one who formed, created, and called them by name now redeems them from all their enemies. God declares them precious and honored, and God loves them.*

1 But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. 3 For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. 4 Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. 5  Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; 6  I will say to the north, “Give them up,” and to the south, “Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth— 7  everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

**Psalm 29**

1 Ascribe to the Lord, you gods, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. 2 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due God’s name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. 3 The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders; the Lord is upon the mighty waters. 4 The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice; the voice of the Lord is a voice of splendor. 5 The voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees; the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon; 6 the Lord makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox. 7 The voice of the Lord bursts forth in lightning flashes. 8 The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. 9 The voice of the Lord makes the oak trees writhe and strips the forests bare. And in the temple of the Lord all are crying, “Glory!” 10The Lord sits enthroned above the flood; the Lord sits enthroned asking forevermore. 11 O Lord, give strength to your people; give them, O Lord, the blessings of peace.

**Second Reading Acts 8:14-17**

*Peter and John are sent to support the new Christians in Samaria, a group that was recently baptized after hearing the good news of Christ through the preaching of Philip. Here the Samaritans receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in the laying on of hands.*

14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15 The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit 16 (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). 17 Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

**Gospel Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**

*The reading opens with questions about the identity of the Messiah. John the Baptist insists that he is not the Messiah; instead, he points ahead to one who is coming. And whether the voice of God was heard by all or only by Jesus, God settles the matter: Jesus is God’s beloved Son.*

15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 16 John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” 21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

**Sermon**

Today we have in front of us the story of the Baptism of Jesus from Luke’s gospel. We have this story every year on this particular festival, so we hear this story from the various gospel writers. Today, however, as we look at the passage from Luke, I’d like for us to talk about what exactly Luke wants to emphasize about Jesus based on how he tells this story. But in order to do that, I’d like to start with a little history.

Way back in the early days of God’s people Israel being formed as God’s people, God’s people had a prophet named Samuel, who acted basically as God’s mouthpiece. That’s pretty much what a prophet always was, a person who shared messages from God with God’s people. Anyway, God’s people had been settled in the Promised Land for a long time and they noticed that the other nations around them had kings, so they decided they really wanted a king, to be like the other nations.

God’s original response to this request was that God always intended to be the leader of God’s people and that human kings tended to be more trouble than they were worth. They would get power hungry and enact policies that were oppressive towards the people they ruled. God loved God’s people and always intended to rule God’s people with justice, peace and love. But God’s people really, really wanted a king like everyone else, so eventually God said, ok. Sometimes we humans want what we want even when its not best for us.

After that, Israel was ruled by human kings, some of whom were good kings who were faithful to God and God’s ways and some kings were completely unfaithful tyrants and some fell in between those two extremes. But the age of the monarchy came to an end when Babylon conquered God’s people, destroyed their Temple and sent a large number of them into exile in Babylon. In the end, the monarchy caused God’s people a lot of pain and suffering.

Now let us look at what is emphasized in today’s passage. We certainly hear John’s description of one who is to come who is more powerful than he is. But in the description of the baptism of Jesus, there is very little description. Nothing about going into the water or coming out of the water or even John baptizing him. Instead, the emphasis falls on this scene in which the heavens open, the Holy spirit descends and a voice from heaven says, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

These words can be found elsewhere in Scripture and knowing that can help us understand the importance of this scene. The words, “You are my son,” can be found in Psalm 2:7. It is an announcement of a king of God’s people chosen by God. The king is announced by calling him “my son” or God’s son. The part that speaks of being “well pleased” is a reference to the servant of God described in Isaiah 42. The first verse says, “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.”

So, what is Luke emphasizing about Jesus in this scene, here before he begins his earthly minister? The emphasis here is on the fact that, through Jesus, God came into this world to be the king of God’s people that God intended from the beginning. This scene prepares us for what we will see throughout the rest of Luke’s gospel as Jesus enacts the reign of God in all that he says and does. Of course, the opening of the heavens, the descending of the Holy Spirit all connect the reign, all connect the realm of God with Jesus. But this is what happens specifically as Jesus is baptized…he is announced to be God, the king who was come in human form.

As we prepare to hear from the gospel of Luke for a majority of the Sundays this year, we approach each text with this question…what does this tell us about the rule, the reign of God? Because whatever each story teaches us about the reign of God is true about the way in which God continues to reign among us today. We certainly know one very important thing and that is that the reign of God is not a violent, oppressive reign. We know this because, when Jesus faced the opposition and violence that human leaders used against him, he suffered and died rather than battling against them.

It is through this suffering and death on the cross that God, through Jesus, gathered us all into his mercy and love and made us children of God. We too are God’s beloved, and God is pleased with us, not because we are perfect, not because we have earned God’s love but because God loves God’s human creation. And God, through the risen Jesus still intends to rule in our hearts and in our lives.

So, we prepare ourselves this year to grow in our understanding of what God’s ways, God’s reign truly looks like as we see how Jesus interacts with humanity throughout the gospel of Luke. And as we do this, we continuously come back to the reign of God as a reign of justice, peace and love that has claimed us as a member of God’s family forever. Amen.