

**“I BAPTIZE YOU WITH WATER...HE WILL BAPTIZE YOU WITH THE HOLY
SPIRIT AND THE FIRE.”AN EXEGESIS OF LUKE 3: 15-18 WITHIN THE
AFRICAN CHURCH CONTEXT WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON INITIATION
RITES**

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ABSTRACT

The twenty-first century Body of Christ in sub-Saharan Africa is confronted with challenges that are unique to this era. Nominal Christianity, false miracle workers modern day Pharisees, false teaching and inappropriate ideas in the church-including exaggerated emphasis on tangible signs and wonders at the expense of piety, skewed evidence of the fullness of the holy spirit, ill-advised prosperity theology, and the collapse of the Christian family unit are some of these challenges. Baptism seems to have been segregated to a silent corner in the church, and the bible is hardly being interpreted authentically in this era of globalization. As a result there is a lot that is being accepted as Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa today which is not authentic biblical Christianity. This research endeavors to bring baptism to the forefront of the church in sub-Saharan Africa where it scripturally belongs, particularly integrating the cultural identity or influence of relevant African rituals. This is attained through a historical-exegetical study of Luke 3 especially verses 15 to 18 in order to suggest an authentic interpretation of this text with particular emphasis on baptism. The hermeneutical method of reading the word behold, within is related to the African concept of initiation rites and fundamental positive lessons will be drawn from this cultural practice. Based on the outcome of this research, the church in sub-Saharan Africa-through interdenominational association, theological training and capacity development of believers-shall be informed on the essence of baptism and be able to relate this sacrament to African cultures hereby teaching people effectively and evangelism efficiently through biblical inspiration and guidance. Through scholarly research endeavors, the church in sub-Saharan Africa has the capacity to empower the clergy and all believers in understanding the interaction of Christianity with African cultures. Authentic interpretation of scripture is significant in the quest to evangelize Africa and enable believers to embrace Christian values under the influence of appropriate cultural values. Ventures to research and elucidate how the bible can influence the honoring of fundamental African rituals such as marriage, burials amongst others may provide solutions to addressing challenges of nominalism and syncretism amongst believers.