

Church of the Divine Love

Sermon Sunday January 10, 2021. Baptism of our Lord

Genesis 1: 1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1: 4-11

Dear people of God,

The Christmas season ends last Wednesday with the feast of the Epiphany and today we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. The beginning and end of the season of Christmas have much in common. On Christmas, we celebrate God becoming one of us, taking upon himself a human nature. On the Feast of the Baptism, we celebrate the public proclamation that Jesus is more than just one of us. He has more than a human nature. He has a Divine Nature. He is the Son of God, in whom the father is well pleased.

Today's Gospel, from the Gospel of Mark, advances the story 30 years. We come upon John, teaching, and baptizing at the Jordan River. He is demanding an end to evil in the world and calling the people to accept his baptism as a sign that they will join him in the fight for the Kingdom of God. He also speaks about the one to come. Jesus chooses to be baptized by John to show that he is one with all those who are fighting against evil and fighting for the Kingdom of God. John says that he himself does not deserve to unfasten Jesus' sandals. The people of the world who long for the Kingdom must see that their King is one of them. The voice of God the Father proclaims that Jesus is the Son of God. This is my Son, my Beloved, in whom I am well pleased.

What does this mean to us? It means that our union with Jesus is a union with God. It means that Jesus is not just another man, not even another extraordinary man. He is God. He has a human nature given to him through Mary, and a divine nature eternally at one with the God. The One, who is our brother, is also the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. We don't just give him the title God. He is God. When we call upon Jesus to help us, we are praying to God. When we receive communion, we receive God within us. When we seek forgiveness, we are forgiven not by the priest but by God. When you married in the Church, Jesus united His Love to your love for each other in the sacrament of marriage.

Baptism introduces us into the fellowship of God's people that is the Church by shaping us inner selves into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Just as the Spirit hovered over the waters at Creation and brought forth life, so now, the same Spirit hovers over the waters of baptism and brings forth the life of Christ in us, a new creation. The waters, the Spirit, and new life: these are the images in that scene of Creation in the Book of Genesis; these are the same images that shape our spiritual existence in the tradition of Christian baptism. We are not dealing with empty images here. We have the power of the Spirit of God at work in and through the signs that God has chosen. The life of the Risen Christ is created in us by the power of the Holy Spirit in our baptism. The sacrament has a real effect. It is not just a sign of our personal faith. By baptism, we are made part of the Body of Christ, which is the community of faith.

The baptized life is not a career that we can pursue part-time, or one day retire from. It is a vocation meant to be lived out with every fiber of our being. That's why it's so important that we renew our baptismal vows over and over again and share in the feast of Christ's body and blood over and over again and read and study Scripture over and over again, because we human beings are forgetful people! An essential part of the Christian vocation is reminding one another who and whose we are. We do that by extending and receiving grace and mercy, by opening ourselves up to vulnerability, and ultimately by

telling the story of the God we meet in Jesus, a story that continues unto the fullness of time. If we want life to remain exactly as it is, and if we want to stay exactly where we are, doing exactly what we're doing, perhaps we should re-think baptism and the Christian life. But if, on the other hand, we desire a life dedicated to following the living God, as we work together to build God's kingdom, then the place to start is at the water's edge.

Do you remember your baptism? Some do, those who were baptized as youth or adults. Many don't, because it happened as they were little babies. Yet even those of us who remember our baptism only because someone told us about it much later, we can still remember what happened afterward. The life we live as baptized followers of Jesus is that afterward. The new creation that we choose to make of ourselves every single day of our lives is that afterward. And the new creation that we are and are becoming is a curious mixture of Word and Spirit. There are Words pronounced over us at our baptism and there is Spirit conferred from the community of faith. And we are remade. A new creation, a fresh start. So, we need reminders.

Of course, we need reminders of our baptism. It is too much of an event to keep in our hearts all the time. We forget what a transformative moment baptism is. We forget that everything old is torn away, like the heavens were rent apart, as Mark says. We forget that our orientation is from that moment; our new life is claimed in that moment. We forget that what we are looking for, longing for, is already ours in that moment. We lose our grip; we forget it even happened. We are still running; we are still looking for what we already have.

Remember your baptism. It isn't just an empty ritual for Sunday mornings. It is a way of living that keeps our eyes open for the descending doves of the Spirit. It is a choice that we can claim to embrace the possibilities in front of us instead of the doubts within us. It is an opportunity to know that we are loved and claimed and that whatever darkness is hiding away in our past or our hearts need not define us anymore. The tearing continues. The remaking continues. Our lives are constantly being taken apart and put back together. And whether we see it descending upon us like a dove or not, the Spirit is a constant companion throughout our lives. It is what inspires us to love and serve and learn and grow. It is what equips us to be a part of the body of Christ in unique and powerful ways. It is what tears us open to new ways of living, new ways of being.

we are reminded that it is time for all of us to go to work, building the Kingdom of God, and bringing His Gospel to every person that we meet. This is a great day. On this Feast Day, we are sent out to a world that so desperately needs us, just like Jesus was, two-thousand years ago! May we bear witness to our Baptisms with our lives, not just with our words. May we live out our Faith every day. And may we put into action, Jesus' good news, by the way that we care and get involved. God sees the light placed within us and pronounces it good. The voice proclaims, "you are my beloved, with you I am well pleased." If we accept those words, if we believe that we are beloved of God, it is not enough to accept that love. Our baptismal vows challenge us to share that love with the world, to tell others, in word and deed that they are also beloved of God. And so, please turn to page 292 of the Book of Common Prayer and join me in the renewal of our baptismal vows.