

Loved, Honored, and Celebrated by God

There came a voice from heaven: “You are My Son, My dear Son! I’m delighted with You.” — Luke 3:22

Humans seek acceptance through so many things — whether it’s the friends we claim, the clothes we wear, or how much, how hard, or how little we work. We’re almost hardwired for approval, aren’t we?

I cannot count how many times my children have said to me something along the lines of, “Daddy, watch this!” It doesn’t matter what it is — twirling in a circle, jumping off the top bunk, making a funny face in the mirror — my kids just want to be sure that I see them, that my eyes are on them, that what they’re doing brings me as much joy as it brings them.

Little kids are quirky like that. They have no pretense about their human need for acceptance.

As we grow older, even though we all still long for that sort of approval, it’s increasingly hard to know where to find it:

You make a new friend, but they let you down. You get the promotion, but you hate the job. You have the baby, but you’re up all night.

Somewhere along the way you can’t help but wonder:

Maybe I’ve missed it. Maybe she/he is not the one. Maybe I’m just not cut out for parenting. Maybe I can find what I’m looking for somewhere else.

But what if there’s another way? What if Jesus knows how you feel? What if the belonging you seek is much closer than you think?

Jesus’ baptism was a defining moment for Him. It was then that Jesus heard the words from Heaven confirming His identity and clarifying His unique vocation, and it’s important to consider the scene in full:

So it happened that, as all the people were being baptized, Jesus too was baptized, and was praying. The Heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form, like a dove, upon Him. There came a voice from Heaven: “You are My Son, My dear Son! I’m delighted with You.” — Luke 3:21-22

Before we unpack the rich, scriptural depth of what this scene reveals about (and perhaps even to) Jesus, let’s first explore the raw physicality of it all.

There is Jesus — wet clothes clinging to His skin, His unruly hair plastered against His forehead, water dripping from His chin as He looks skyward and sees:

There is Holy Spirit, in wild and soaring flight, coming down from above in the form of a dove, looking for a place to alight, a person to anoint, and then the voice from Heaven is heard.

Yes, there is Abba Father — words deep like thunder, accepting and approving and affirming the Son, confirming within His soul what Jesus somehow already knows but still longs to hear:

“You are My Son, My dear Son! I’m delighted with You.”

It really is a remarkable scene, isn’t it? So remarkable that each of the gospel writers highlights it as a turning point in Jesus’ journey. It’s as if they want us to know: things were different after the baptism, and Jesus knew it.

So what did those weighty words from the Father mean, and how would Jesus have understood them in relation to His life, identity, and calling?

Like most devout Jews of His time, Jesus was immersed in the holy scriptures. And it's in these scriptures, the narrative and history of the Hebrew people, the poetry and prophecy of the Jews, that Jesus confirms His deepest identity.

If you listen carefully to the iconic words at His baptism — “You are My Son, My dear Son! I'm delighted with You” — you will hear echoes of at least two ancient passages that would have come to Jesus' mind in this moment:

- From the book of Psalms:

I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you’. — Psalm 2:7

- From the prophet Isaiah:

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him... — Isaiah 42:1

There are all sorts of opinions as to how Jesus came to understand His identity and calling, but I am convinced that it was a journey that led Him there, a journey of faith and discovery shaped primarily by three things:

1. the stories about His birth,
2. the unusual relationship in prayer He shared with Abba,
3. and the Hebrew scriptures in which He was immersed.

The answers came from His Bible, the Hebrew scriptures in which He found a rich tapestry of figures, historical persons, prophetic pictures and symbols of worship. And in this tapestry, where others saw only a fragmented collection of various figures and hopes, Jesus saw His own face. His Hebrew Bible provided the shape of His own identity.

It seems the events surrounding Jesus' baptism provided the final pieces of the puzzle, affirming His identity and piecing together the unique and mysterious aspects of His calling.

As He watched the dove descend and felt the Spirit “upon Him,” Jesus heard in the voice of His Father prophetic echoes of ancient promises: the promise of a kingly Son of the Lord who would inherit the nations (Psalm 2), the promise of a chosen servant, in whom the Father delights, who would suffer and die for His people, but who would be vindicated in the end (Isaiah 42-55).

The time was here at last. Jesus knew exactly what He was called to do.

In the person of Jesus, we encounter Someone whose identity and calling were not in competition. He lived and played, wept and worked from a deep and abiding knowledge of who He was: the dear Son of the Father.

Like you and me, Jesus was faced with the frightening alternative of trying to find His identity in something less than the love of God. It's a deeply human temptation, isn't it? Because each and every one of us longs to be loved, to know that we belong, to know there is a place for us at the table, a place for us in the family, which is part of what Jesus, the dear Son of the Father, came to accomplish on our behalf.

With His identity and calling now clearly laid out before Him, it's as if you can almost hear Jesus whisper in response, “Abba, watch this!”

Today, remember that you are loved, honored, and celebrated by God Himself and share that love with those around you! Who in your circle of friends, family, co-workers, or neighbors, can you love today in a special, appreciative, expressive way?