



Pastor Gwen's Message
Baptism of Our Lord
"Listen for God"
Sunday January 10, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

In confirmation class, Lyla, Margaret and I have been studying the New Testament. We have just completed the Gospels. Although it is a general overview of each book of the Bible, I started thinking about how each book begins. And each of the Gospels start off with a story about Jesus, but they are different. Luke and Matthew offer the most familiar accounts, but even they differ. Luke tells us about the annunciation to Mary, the birth at Bethlehem, the visit by the shepherds. Matthew, however tells us of Jesus' genealogy, Joseph's dream, the gifts of the Magi and the flight to Egypt.

John's perspective is different from both of these Gospels. His vision exceeds the boundaries of space and time as he announces that before anything was made, God's Word already was. Jesus was there in the beginning, before creation began. We talked about this last week. John does tell us though that, "The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." John 1:14

Today since this is the 2nds year in our lectionary, we see how the remaining Gospel of Mark gets under way. We hear nothing about the birth of Jesus or his early years. There are no assertions about the Word becoming flesh. Mark chooses to begin telling his story with the baptism of Jesus by John. Jesus walks into Mark's Gospel as a grown man. Quite interesting don't you think.

But I challenge you to think of the Christmas story. I believe that it is a story about the plan of God's salvation for the world. If so, then Mark's Gospel does

contain a Christmas story. But his story is the account of Jesus' baptism. Just as the other Gospels reveal their entire plot through the gifts of the Magi, the Word made flesh dwelling among us, or the song of the Christmas angels, so Mark's Gospel in reality, does the same.

Mark's single phrase that tells the whole story of God's salvation is found in verse 11, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased." This is the voice of God that Jesus hears as he comes out of the water of the river Jordan, where he is plunged under by John, in solidarity with the entire blighted human race. The heavens are torn apart as Jesus comes out of the water. Torn like sheets being ripped up for rags, the heavens open and a dove descends on him and that voice, that voice pronounces that Jesus is the Son of God.

And there our story about baptism ends. There is no other fanfare, as none is needed. God said it all. Jesus is His Son, the Son of God. And just as quickly as Jesus is pronounced God's son, the Gospel writer moves on to the temptation of Jesus by the devil and the beginning of Jesus ministry in Galilee.

Where do we see and feel these important words from God again? These words from the Heavenly Father are true as Jesus breathes his last on the cross and he is buried in a tomb. These same words come true when Jesus is alive again coming out from the tomb. These same words are true as He ascends to His Father. God is pleased, as Jesus is His Only Son.

But why does Mark find Jesus' baptism important enough to start his Gospel with? After all today is a remembrance of that baptism that is celebrated by Christians everywhere. I think the baptism of Jesus is an enactment for the world to see that Jesus is in solidarity with the entire human race. Jesus is human. It shows us that God became flesh some 30 years prior right from the womb of the Virgin Mary.

The word Emmanuel comes to mind. This word means God with us. God for us. God among us. It is a Christmas word that happens on that silent holy night so long ago, but it is also a baptism word. God is for us all. He joined us in His humanity and he joined us in the waters of baptism. And that folks is the good news.

God is for us all. Every last one of us human beings. He does not care that we are old or young, black or white, gay or straight, physically challenged or anything else. God became human to walk among us, to relate to us and to

save us. And “Joy to the World” for that. The Lord came to us in the manger and has jumped into the water of the Jordan to be baptized for the love of all humanity, for the love of you and me!

And knowing that, what do we do with that? Well, I think at the least we can follow him into those waters of baptism. We are baptized to engage in a life of solidarity with Him. And when we do that, we can too hear that same voice of God from heaven saying to us, “You are my beloved, child in whom I am well pleased.”

Outrageous, you bet. How can we have the right to be called children of God? Children of God with whom God is pleased? What an unacceptable thought to let our human selves think that we are good enough to be pleasing to our creator. Because folks, it is not up to us. We are created for God’s pleasure and He did not create junk. We are created in His mighty image and we all need to believe it.

So go home today and write this on your mirror and savor God’s words when you are brushing your teeth each morning. Post it on the refrigerator, so while you are cooking dinner you can savor those words. “You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.”

We need to hear these words over and over again so that they sink in. But most of all we need to listen for them in our daily walk. Sometimes these words come as a whisper, a mumble and other times a shout or even like a baseball bat smacking you on the side of your head. If you listen they will come. God repeats these words to you over and over again.

Some folks say that Christianity is just a matter of believing. There is truth in that statement. Some folks say that Christianity is a matter of doing. There is truth in that too. And I would add to that the statement that Christianity is a matter of listening. We need to listen to God, to hear his words to us in order to believe and then act on those beliefs.

So I urge you to listen for messages from heaven. Listen for what Jesus heard at his baptism. Listen for the same message spoken to us every day in the mundane cracks in our lives. Listen.

It is no easy thing to do as day after day our world is echoing voices that do not confirm what God says about us. The world will tell us that we are worthless if we don’t do this or that, if we are not beautiful without bags

under our eyes or with slim bodies. The world voices temptation straight from the devil that urges us to seek approval in other ways, ways contrary to God's way. And boy oh boy, do these ways sometimes sounds good. Just buy this new truck and you go to the top of the world. Join Weight Watches or Jenny Craig and you will get noticed in your new body.

Folks, these are the works of the devil. They may sound respectable and smooth but they are a lie. Discipleship is more than a matter of belief and practice. It is knowing how to listen and discern which voices are true.

If we go back to our baptismal covenant page 227 in our hymnal, we find that the right voice is the one and only God. After being baptized the pastor reads these words, "You belong to Christ, in whom you have been baptized." And then after a prayer, the baptized is marked on the forehead with oil and these words are said, "Mike, Sally or Judy, child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever." Those words ring true; we are marked as a child of God from that day forward. And our parents and sponsors have made a promise to live as God's people, to bring you to worship and the Eucharist, teach you the tenants of the faith; 10 commandments, creeds and Lord's Prayer, and to put the Bible in your hands and to nurture you through their own words and deeds. Then at our confirmation, which is really an affirmation of baptism, we affirm our faith in the one true God and deny the devil asking God to help us continue on our journey of being a child of God. And God will bless His children as they remember His covenant with them; you are a child of God and He is pleased with you.

This morning we used Thanksgiving for Baptism containing Luther's flood prayer to thank God for his gift of baptism and the Holy Spirit he graciously gives to all His beloved children. This Thanksgiving for Baptism prayer is a reminder that we all can renew our own baptismal covenant with God revealed to us in Jesus Christ. And what a great reminder to listen to God's message that "You are my beloved child, with whom I am well pleased."

So yes, being a Christian is believing and it is doing but also it is careful listening. Listening to God's promises of forgiveness, abundant and eternal life. It is also listening to each other as we share our faith journey. And it is also seeing Christmas in Baptism, Jesus coming to be like us in the water and the Word made flesh. So don't be afraid to sing, "Joy to the World, the Lord Has Come". He comes to us in that water and Word to claim us as His children.

And then listen to His life saving words, "You are my beloved, with you I am well pleased." **AMEN**

