

Epiphany I Year B  
The Baptism of Christ  
Mark 1:4-11  
January 14, 2018  
St. George's Episcopal Church  
Fr. Chris

## The Gift of God's Love and Approval

“And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

How many children have longed to hear those words spoken by their parents? You are my child, my beloved; with you I am well pleased.” As Ethan and Karl have the water of Baptism poured over their heads, God is looking down on them from heaven and affirming them as God's beloved children, and God is well pleased with them! Today and forever, no matter what!

We all need to be loved and approved. These are major drivers and movers throughout our lives. We search for love from the time we are born to the day we leave. Love sustains us. Love invigorates when it touches us, and it can touch us in so many ways, some quite small and some great. Whether it is a simple acknowledgement of our common humanity as someone greets a homeless beggar on the street, or the hugs and greetings we receive every time we return home, love is the greatest gift that life has to offer as the poet Rainer Maria Rilke observed.

Our parents love us. They may have trouble sometimes in communicating that love, as no parent is perfect, but it is a natural given that parents love their children. It is the strongest bond in life, between parent and child, and no matter where a child moves, nor whatever success or depths that child faces, that child will still be loved for who they are, not what they do. That is very unique and rare in human experience: unconditional love.

Our God loves us. God loves us with no conditions. God gives love that we neither deserve nor merit. God freely gives it anyway. We are God's children. What parent, as Jesus asks, would give their children bad things? God gives each of us an abundance blessings to enjoy in this life.

God is love and because of Jesus, we know God is a lover. God has no trouble communicating that love to us, if we are but open to see, hear and receive it. God accepts you just the way you are, gifts, faults, strengths, weaknesses, successes and failures, good deeds and sins. God will always be there for us, no matter what, no matter how far we wander. God always searches for his lost sheep. Who else does that? God desires that not one of the sheep will be lost. Unlike human parents who are stand-ins for God and whose love is at times imperfect or not without its flaws, God's love is always perfect, complete. God is the Good Shepherd of God's family, God's flock. Today these two young boys, just starting out in life join this flock. What a Christmas and

Birthday present their parents are giving them! And this special gift is also from the rest of the flock here at St. George's, their new brothers and sisters in Christ.

And not only does God accept them, but we, the local flock at St. George's does likewise. They are woven into the fabric of this family. In a few moments, the rest of the flock will fill up the Baptismal font with water, symbolizing the community which is behind, with and surrounds these two children. They will always be a part of us, beginning today. We come, we go, but no matter where we are, this flock is our family. Next to our biological families, it is precious to belong to another family who cares for you as your parents do and also because God is both the patriarch and matriarch of this new family for them. "By this they will know you are my followers: that you love one another."

The journey in Christian life is about understanding what it means to be loved and to love. At some point we must learn that loving is not about being loved (passive) and seeking to be loved, but rather it is about being a lover acting on the love we have been given. Not being loved but loving others. Seek not to be loved; but rather, always seeking to love others.

"I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." John washed those who were repenting sinners who came to him with water to give them a fresh start and a second chance to cleanse themselves of the soil of sin. Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit. What's that?

The Holy Spirit is God. Today, the Spirit of God enters into these two children, just as God entered into you and I and became a part of our life here in this world. How? Like an ember implanted in our hearts the Holy Spirit will guide us and lead us home to God, so long as we do not reject and quench that spirit. The Holy Spirit in each of us will inspire us to live a happy, joy-filled, fulfilled, blessed, aware, eyes and ears and hearts wide-open and Holy life.

These two precious children have no soil or spot of sin on them. They are already clean. They do not yet need repentance, like those of us adults witnessing this wonderful event today. It is a wonder for each of us to behold such innocence. We long to live like that. Our Baptism provides the way: Forgiveness, restoration, but most importantly, the love of our God: We are all God's beloved, and God is well pleased with us.

AMEN