

“Remember Your Baptism”

Meditation on Matthew 3:13-17

Jan. 8, 2017

Baptism of our Lord Sunday

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’

Did you all take down your Christmas decorations this week? What is the tradition for your family, if you are still putting up Christmas decorations? Put them up Thanksgiving weekend and take them down on New Years or the day after? I really liked taking walks at night throughout Advent in our neighborhood and seeing all the lights. We didn’t have a lot of Christmas decorations outside--just a small Nativity scene, a fresh wreath for the front door and the lights from our Christmas tree shining through the window. Any of you still have your Christmas tree up? I do. I love to see my Christmas tree all lit up in my living room at night, and the Nativity scenes make me feel all warm inside. They are a sign to us that God is still with us!

God loves us so much that he became one of us; he emptied himself of his divinity for our sakes (Phil. 2:5-8) -- to experience all that we experience as human beings, and become a slave for us. When we were perishing in our

sins, God came to save us! God came in an unexpected way -- as a humble baby in a manger. During Advent, we have the freedom to boldly witness to our faith, without seeming like religious fanatics. Lots of people display their Christianity for all to see during Advent by decorating their homes and yards, giving gifts, writing cards, and coming to worship the Lord on Christmas Eve and sometimes even Christmas Day.

January can be a hard month --is it a hard month for you? Not just because of the cooler temperatures and relative darkness of winter. But because the outward beauty of the Christmas season and the freedom to openly share our faith disappears. If you are still talking about Jesus in public in the middle of January, people think you are weird--or you are just trying to get them to come to your church. When we go back to the ordinary routine of our daily lives after Christmas, and without the outward signs of the Christmas season, we may forget the wonder of God's love and the beauty of our salvation. We may forget to keep looking for signs that God is with us. Every day, there are signs of His love and tender care--and the newness of our lives in Christ-- our redemption from our sins.

One of the most important signs of God's covenant with us in Jesus Christ is something we encounter and experience every day. That sign is WATER.

Today, as we recall John's baptism of Jesus, we encounter all 3 persons of "the Trinity" -- Father, Spirit and Son, just as we are baptized in the "name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This is part of God's plan for salvation as Jesus teaches in Matthew 28. He makes it clear that baptism is necessary for Christ's followers and to grow the Church,

which is open to all people in every land. And that baptism is a reminder of Christ's everlasting presence with those who believe on him and seek to be pleasing to him.

In Matthew 28:18-20, the risen Christ comes to his disciples, some of whom are having doubts, and he says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Immediately after Jesus is baptized in Matthew 3, God responds with blessings for Jesus, John, and all who are there to witness the theophany -- the supernatural happening. The heavens open, the Spirit descends like a dove on Jesus, and God proclaims Jesus to be God's Son, "the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

The significance of the Jordan as the place where Jesus is baptized is that Joshua led the ancient Israelites across the Jordan River into the land of the Promise. Crossing the river, with the priests and the ark of the covenant leading the way, they leave behind their old identities just as we die to ourselves in baptism so we may live as Christ. Crossing the Jordan, the Israelites are no longer slaves of the Egyptians, just as we are no longer slaves to sin but by faith new creations in Him. The Israelites are no longer a wandering, homeless band of aliens; they are *heirs* to the land God has given them-- "children of the Promise." Some theologians believe that Jesus-- which came from the Hebrew *Yeshua* or Joshua in English -- is the "new Joshua"-- leading the people of the New Covenant to eternal life in God's Heavenly Kingdom.

We discover John's reluctance to baptize his cousin, God's Son, in this

passage. Does that surprise you that John didn't at first want to be obedient to the Lord's request? It brings to mind the scene in John 13 when Peter refuses, at first, to allow Jesus to wash his feet. And Jesus answers in verses 8-9, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." And Peter responds, "Then Lord, not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!"

Before Jesus asks him to baptize him, John expresses his unworthiness to the crowd. He says in Matthew 3:11, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." John's humility comes from his understanding that he is in the presence of holiness, and he, like all human beings, is sinful, no matter how good he tries to be. But Jesus insists, for this is God's way -- to "fulfill all righteousness." John relents.

Baptism in *water* is key. Water has been a symbol of life since ancient times. Modern science tells us that human bodies are about 70 percent water, but even the ancients knew that one could not survive long without drinking water, especially in the arid climate in which Jesus lived. What's more, water *is* the symbol *for God* in ancient Judaism. God is "the spring (or fountain) of living water" in Jer. 2:13 and 17:13. In Isaiah 55:1, God invites all to come to Him with, "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters." Isaiah also speaks of salvation using the language of water in 12:2-3, saying

² Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. ³ With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

David uses the metaphor of God supplying water for the soul in Ps. 63:1 when he prays, "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there

is no water.” The psalmist in 42:1-2 also sings, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"

After Jesus is baptized, he will beckon others to come to the Father through him to satisfy soul thirst. Jesus, in John 4, asks a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well to give him a drink. Surprised, she asks, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?”... ¹⁰ Jesus answers, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you *living water*.”

¹¹ The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?... ¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” Jesus professes to be the living water, again, in John 7. After the officers are sent to arrest Jesus, he cries out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.”’

Today, we, too, will come to the living water, in response to Christ’s invitation. We are coming to remember our baptism, though for some of us, it was long ago! We come to remember that we **were** baptized and what that means--how the Spirit claims us and fills us with spiritual gifts --and still fills, refreshes and equips us for God’s work today. How the Church has welcomed us and promised to nurture us as a child of God, a brother or sister in the faith. We come to remember how our gracious God forgave us for all

our sins and still forgives us. Through one baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God forgives the sins of yesterday, today and forever!

We come to the living water to be strengthened and united as the Body of Christ, made one in Him. We come not because we are worthy, but because we understand, like John, that we cannot make ourselves worthy for God. We come because, like the Samaritan woman, we thirst for the living water to nourish our souls to eternal life, because salvation is a gift from God by faith in Jesus Christ, not something *we could ever do for ourselves*. We come not just to receive God's blessings but to be a blessing to one another and be pleasing to Him. We come with joy as God's beloved so that we may be inspired to tell the world that God loves them, too!

Let us pray.

Holy One, our Living Water, we thank you for leading your Son, Jesus Christ, to the Jordan River to be baptized by John and show us the way back to you. Thank you, Lord, for beckoning us, even now, to come to you and remember our baptisms. Stir us to recall today and always that we belong to you--NOT the world! Move us to joy at the thought of what you have done for us every time we see water of any kind-- that we have been cleansed from our sin. Help us to recall each day, especially when we might be tempted to be discouraged or doubt, that we have received the gift of your Spirit, equipping us for every good work you have ordained for us to do. Teach us to be obedient to you. Reassure us that we are your beloved--now and forever. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.