

The Rev. Joshua Wullenweber  
Baptism of our Lord  
Mark 1:4-11  
Sunday, January 7, 2024

Yesterday the church celebrated the beginning of the Epiphany season where we heard the familiar story of the three wise men who came bringing gold, frankincense, and myrrh but you know what would have happened if there had been three wise WOMEN instead of three wise MEN, don't you? The three wise WOMEN would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the Baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and would have given practical gifts – like diapers, formula, and wipes.

We give thanks for the wisemen whose journey – how ever long it took – helped to reveal further this gift that was the Christ child laying in the manger. Yet in our liturgical year, in the course of just two short weeks we have moved from the birth of Christ to now to celebrating the beginning of his ministry. Hearing once again, the story of John the Baptist baptizing Jesus in the wilderness we prepare to celebrate, as Mark puts it, the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, God's son.

At this point in the story, Jesus has not made his ministerial debut beyond his family and friends. He was, up to this point, Jesus ben Joseph (Jesus son of Joseph) a carpenter and stone worker from the hill country surrounding Galilee. Up to this point Jesus has lived a fairly normal life but all of this changes the day he meets John on the banks of the Jordan.

Since the beginning of time God has used water to do amazing things in the life of God's people. We hear in our text from Genesis this morning that it was water which God used to bring peace among the chaos. We are told God's Spirit moved over the water bringing forth light where there was darkness and creating order from which the whole world would come to be.

God's same Spirit and that same water would be used to do amazing things that afternoon on the banks of the Jordan. When Jesus would descend into the cloudy and murky waters of that desert stream, recline upon John's hand, and be lowered into the water and raised once again like so many before him. But like in the beginning, God's Spirit was hovering over the waters there that day. For we are told that as Jesus was raised from that river the heavens were torn open, the voice of God bellowed from on high and proclaimed for all to hear "this is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Now the question of "why" often comes to mind when we reflect on this amazing event. We wonder why, God's only Son, the one born sinless and unblemished would need to be baptized in the first place. Was it for his sake or for ours? Was it to prove a point or to give direction? Was it a necessity or really simply the work of the Holy Spirit?

Scholars have many answers to this very question, and some answers could even be right, but like many occurrences in scripture - does the why really matter or would our time be better spent focusing on the "what" of the whole event. Because the "what" that took place that day by God through Christ is something that brings hope for all Gods people for centuries to come.

What Christ did when he entered those waters promised solidarity with God's people no matter where they find themselves in this life. For the same Christ who was in the beginning with God and the Holy Spirit is the same Christ who entered the waters that day. The same Christ who like many of us knew hard work, cracked hands, a sweaty brow, and achy back is to the same Christ who also stepped beyond those banks. The same Christ, like many of us, who saw social unrest, poverty, and war around him, is the same Christ who felt the water rush over his head. The same Christ, like many of us, who held the hands of his loved ones who were sick and dying and the same who watched as his family members struggle from time to time was the same Christ that was baptized by John in the Jordan.

By entering the water that day Christ promised that no matter what bank we find ourselves standing on - he sees us, he knows us, and he accompanies us by those same baptismal waters that touched his head as well. There is something important about a leader who goes before you and there is something even more important and life giving about a God who makes a way and clears a path for all in and through the waters of baptism.

Whether those waters have touched your head recently or long ago those same waters still hold an immeasurable weight. Weight that sustains us as we navigate the twists and turns of this journey that we each find ourselves on. In good times the waters sustain us and in the difficult ones they nourish our tired souls.

Those waters promise that we are above all else children of God. Those waters show us day in and day out that we are enough. Those waters guarantee us that regardless of this world's pains and struggles – the sickness, the pain, the war, the divorce, the heartache, the death - at the end of the day those waters promise - we will always rest in God's loving arms forever.

This is good news amid a world that pushes and pulls us in many different directions - emotionally, spiritually, and physically. This is good news amid a life that has seen sickness, heart ache and death. This is good news because it is the reminder and the promise that the same God that accompanied Christ in the water is the same God that accompanies us as well.

Epiphany is a time of discovery. Discovering God in the ordinary and the extraordinary. As you approach the altar today, I invite you, as you are comfortable, to run your fingers through the waters of the font. To let the cool waters of this life-giving pool remind you of the promise of God's never failing love. Take that water and make a sign of the cross on your forehead and let the feeling of the cool water on your forehead remind you of the cross for which you have been sealed with. And let us all remember the words first spoke to Christ that God also speaks to each of us – “you are my beloved, whom I am well pleased.”

Thanks be to God for this gift.

Amen.