

EPIPHANY ONE: BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

BACKGROUND

All four Gospels retell the story of Jesus' baptism. Traditionally, his baptism marks the official start of his ministry. This is not because he hadn't done any teaching or pastoring before this. To the contrary. We see him in the Temple as a teenager, already engaged in theological discussion (see Luke 2:41-52). But the Gospel writers chose to highlight his baptism as a kind of launch event for his ministry. Why? John was baptizing people in the Jordan for the forgiveness of sins, something Jesus wasn't in need of. By the days of Jesus, baptism, as a Jewish practice, had been in place for more than 100 years. It was a ritual act of purification, the water as an image of washing and cleaning. It was an outward act people did to announce their desire to be clean on the inside. In the river, the image of the old rolling away, and the new rolling in, is subtle but powerful. It was also as a symbol of relationship with the community. Jesus begins his ministry with *that* baptism, a symbol of grace and mercy and renewal, values that will define both his teaching and actions, but also the community of people who would follow him.

DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever been able to keep a New Year's resolution? What was it?
2. How do you typically respond when you're unable to keep a resolution or accomplish a goal that you set for yourself?
3. How does failure personally impact you?
4. Read **Mark 1:4-11**. (This is the story of Jesus' baptism - see *Background* above for more details.) How is Jesus' own baptism a symbol of his grace towards us? What does it say about his approach to the failures we experience?
5. Perhaps this is why the ministry of Jesus begins with his baptism, something we can look to and be reminded of the core values of the Gospel. Tell us about your own baptism.
6. Read **Romans 6:1-14**. What meaning of baptism does Paul give in this passage? What encouraging words are in this passage?
7. Paul begins the passage asking the Roman church to remember their baptism. Why is remembering our baptism a healthy practice?
8. Is there an area of your life right now that needs the reminder of God's grace and mercy? How can we pray for you in this?

CLOSE IN PRAYER