

Readings - Baptism of Jesus  
Matthew 3:13-17

### **Baptismal Light**

As Christians and churches we have just completed the one season of the year where we are seen by all the world. Few question the publicity Christians get at Christmas. Oh I have heard that we are supposed to say 'season's greetings' but I know few who follow that rule and I personally don't know anyone who is actually offended by Merry Christmas.

At Christmas People expect to see Salvation Army bell ringers at the store, we are prepared to hear Christmas Carols sung and piped through the shopping malls, People around the world send donations to local Christian and church charities, More people show up for church on Christmas eve than any other day of the year, and I would imagine it's one of the few days most families pray before their family meal.

As I pondered this I began wondering what we would need to do as Christians to be that 'out' and public in a positive way the rest of the year? What are the other seasons where we are seen and heard? Most commonly we as the church are present in peoples life events - births, deaths, and weddings. The events that every one knows and experiences. The public life events.

Perhaps a public, community event is what the baptism of Jesus is about. Even in our scripture this morning we see the prophet wonder why Jesus needed to be baptized. After all you likely learned as a child that baptism as a child is a cleansing ritual. And although that is a piece of the sacrament, the forgiveness of sin is only one part of the grace of baptism. Baptism is rather initiation and identification. Baptism is the sacrament by which acknowledge God cherishes us as children in our baptism we (or our parents) choose to publicly accept that love and grace while being welcomed into the body of Christ.

So perhaps by being baptized Jesus was showing solidarity with his community. Jesus was willing to be identified as one of the people of God. And in this act of Baptism we see his righteousness fulfills the will of God communally. Baptism, for Jesus, was less about forgiveness than it was about commissioning, the inauguration of his mission and ministry and assurance of God's presence.

Still, folks had heard Jesus was to come and baptize with fire and spirit so along with John they must have been wondering what was going on. Wondering, that is until the heavens were opened and the Spirit of God descended like a dove declaring "This is my son in whom I am well pleased." Jesus is identified as chosen of God. The spirit of the holy acknowledges pleasure

with Jesus. So his baptism is the first adult public appearance. (and wouldn't you know that as soon as Jesus is publicly acknowledged he faces immediate temptation and questioning).

It seems to me this is just another example of how the biblical stories can align with our lives today. How often is it that we too recognize ourselves or others as honored, loved and blessed and then immediately face ridicule or temptation. But Jesus cherished his identity and lived into it fully which meant he did not succumb to the temptations that we so often do.

But before we get too far off the subject at hand I wonder if we might consider than what baptisms means for us. Or even even I might ask a harsher question why does baptism mean so little to us?

Oh, I know it is true that for most families of faith we make a very big deal of the baptism day. But while the day itself may be a big deal for some, our emphasis on baptism seems to end there. Few parents I know remind their children of their baptism (or remember their own, for that matter) or celebrate the anniversary of their baptism with anything similar to the attention we lavish on birthdays or even wedding anniversaries. Further, my experience is that folks outside of deeply religious families have next to no sense of what baptism means or why it matters.

Baptism is to be the commissioning for our life, the beginning of a journey with the most Holy, day in and day out. "Sometimes I wonder if amid all of our customary focus on baptism as washing away sin, we have missed the profound words of empowering grace that are spoken here to Jesus and also to us. For we, too, are God's beloved children, those with whom God is well pleased."<sup>1</sup>

You see God doesn't think of us, the same way the rest of the world does. We as Christians shouldn't think of one another in that way either. We live in a world where you need to have a certain amount of wealth, or looks or... What is it that you don't have enough of or aren't? I know the messages perhaps you are not skinny enough, strong enough, successful enough, rich enough, popular enough, beautiful enough, young enough, ....you fill in your blank.

Which means that the message of baptism -- that God has declared that we *are* enough, that God accepts us just as we are, and that God desires to do wonderful things for and through us -- is a message I think many of us desperately need to hear time and time again.

So I am going to invite us to do that today. To share those words of affirmation with one another.

I have pulled back out our Christmas eve candles - still in the basket from a few weeks past and I want us once again to celebrate the revelation of God's light not just in this world in a little babe in a manger but in you and I. In our baptisms we and or our godparents usually receive a candle to remember our baptism. We are to light it on the anniversary of our baptism every year. I don't know many who do that, so today in a way these candles will be symbols of those. This might be a challenge but I really hope you will join in this precious act of loving an honoring one

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<sup>1</sup> Lose David, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)

another as God loves and honour us. I am going to ask each of you to take a candle and we are going to pass the light to one another. As you pass the light of Christ I would like you to say to the person “You are loved” or “You are beloved of God” or “In you God is well pleased” I’m giving you a few options so you can find the one that fits and is comfortable for you to say. As you do this try to look into the persons eyes, try to mean it, try to honour one another and God honours us.

As the candles are being lit we are going to sing - Let there be light.

“let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” [Matthew 5:16]. Amen.

Now you can choose to keep those candles or you can give them back. I might suggest you consider lighting them (or having them in a prominent place) for yourself to see every day of Epiphany the presence and revelation of God’s light and spirit.

Love bring us to our Jordon of newly opened eyes.

Amen.