

## **Sermon and Prayers – Indiana-Kentucky Synod**

Baptism of our Lord

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

January 7, 2024

Pastor Nancy Nyland, Director for Evangelical Mission

Gospel Reading - Mark 1:4-11

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter.

**Glory to you O Lord.**

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 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."

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you O Christ.**

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This Sunday, we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord.

Just a couple of weeks ago we celebrated Christmas, the birth of Jesus, the Word become flesh, the babe in the manger.

On Saturday, January 6<sup>th</sup>, we celebrated the Epiphany, the visit of the Wisemen to the child Jesus.

And now on January 7<sup>th</sup>, we celebrate the baptism of Jesus.

Given this sequence in the Gospel of Mark, it would make sense, according to our practices, to think that Jesus was baptized as an infant or small child. But he was not.

Jesus was baptized as an adult. It is thought that Jesus was about 30 years old when he was baptized by John in the Jordan river. This is a good reminder that baptism can happen at any age.

I remember the baptism of an 83-year-old woman as I served as a parish pastor. She was home bound. Since she couldn't come to church, the church went to her. With several church members and her husband surrounding her, I sprinkled water on her head from a simple kitchen bowl. "Ruby, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. You have been marked with the cross of Christ forever and sealed with the Holy Spirit." What a beautiful baptism! What an amazing celebration of new life in Christ!

We claim elements of Jesus' baptism as we form our theology, our beliefs, our faith.

We are baptized with water and with God's Word. Martin Luther teaches us in the Small Catechism. Baptism is not just water, but it is the water used according to God's command and connected with His Word.

Luther continues, "What are the benefits of baptism? Baptism effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, just as the words and promises of God declare."

When Jesus came up out of the water, a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The voice that came from heaven is God's voice. The same voice that in creation said, "Let there be light." And there was light. The same voice which our Psalm for today, Psalm 29, declares: "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty." This voice claims Jesus as God's Son, as God's beloved, and assures Jesus that the Father is well pleased with him.

In our baptism, we, too are claimed as God's own, as God's beloved. We are named, child of God. God chooses us. We begin a new relationship with God. This is who we are, and this is whose we are — God's beloved children.

And just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. Like Jesus, we also receive that gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism.

This Holy Spirit, this Spirit of God, this third person of the Trinity, lives in us, dwells in us.

I don't know about you, but for me this is a humbling thought. That God chooses me as God's own. That God's Spirit chooses to dwell in me. It reminds me of the scripture from Romans 8 that assures us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. That love of God, that love of Jesus, is always present with us as the Spirit dwells in us, as God makes God's home in us.

After Jesus is baptized, he is driven out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit and tempted by Satan. Jesus resists these temptations and then is waited on by angels. Jesus is not alone through this challenging experience in the wilderness. Jesus is accompanied by the Holy Spirit and God provides for his sustenance.

Let this remind us, that when we are tempted, when we spend time in the wilderness, when we are walking through dark times, we are never alone. The Holy Spirit accompanies us, God provides for us. Even when we don't realize or recognize God's presence and provision, God is with us. You are never alone. God abides with you. God dwells in you.

After his time in the wilderness, Jesus comes to Galilee, proclaims the good news of God, and says, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news."

And then Jesus begins His public ministry. Jesus calls some disciples, rebukes an unclean spirit and heals Simon's mother-in-law. When the news gets out about Jesus' words and actions, people flock to him and he heals various diseases and casts out many demons.

In a public way, following his baptism, Jesus' begins to live into fulfilling His purpose, God's purpose for him.

In many ways Jesus' daily life is transformed after His baptism. It is different. It changes. It is a new beginning.

We just celebrated the beginning of a new year. It is 2024, can you believe it? Many of us make New Year's resolutions. Did you? I read an article recently suggesting that we should create intentions, rather than resolutions.

There is something about being intentional in our lives that brings transformation. Are you ready and or willing to try a new thing or two? Are you ready and or willing to do something in a new way. How about experimentation? Are you up for that?

And how does this intentionality, this transformation, this trying of new things, this experimentation fit into your purpose in life? How does it fit into God's purpose for your own personal life, into the purpose of your congregation, and/or into your involvement in your faith community?

How does God's purpose for your life become a part of creating intentions and intentionality as you go forth into a new year?

Baptism — it is one of the ways that God's grace comes to us. It's only a small splash of water but combined with God's Word it marks the beginning of a whole new life. A life of repentance and forgiveness, of the presence of God's Spirit, of our union with Jesus, of our becoming part of the body of Christ, the church.

The good news is that this new life, this baptism, comes with a new beginning every single day. Marked with the cross + of Christ forever, washed in the blood of Jesus, we are forgiven and freed. Free to love God. Free to love neighbor. Free, but never on our own.

In this new year of 2024, the Spirit who dwells within you, the Spirit who is constantly on the move in our world, will be offering you opportunities to serve God, to serve others, to step out of your comfort zone and live out your faith intentionally in new ways.

May we go forth with anticipation and hope accompanied by the God who chooses us, claims us, graces us, loves us and makes all things new. Amen.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

As we celebrate Christ embodied in human form, we pray for God's blessing on the church, the world, and all of creation.

**A brief silence.**

Inspire wisdom and a spirit of proclamation in your church, God of forgiveness. Uplift your disciples to share the truth of your word in community. Encourage us to live into the promises of baptism. God of grace,

**receive our prayer.**

Renew your creation, God of thunder and mighty waters. Restore the rivers in which your children are baptized. May fields flourish and grow. Summon the stewards and caretakers of the land to cherish your good works. God of grace,

**receive our prayer.**

Give strength to world leaders, God who is present in every country and community. Raise up leaders committed to equity and healing. Grant them discernment and compassion as they lead in love. God of grace,

**receive our prayer.**

Protect and cherish the most vulnerable among us, God of strength. Accompany those separated from family or hurting from broken relationships. Shelter our unhoused neighbors and any experiencing poverty. Protect those incarcerated in prisons and detention centers. Care for the sick and suffering (especially). God of grace,

**receive our prayer.**

Encourage congregations, God who calls and sends disciples. Guide us in accompanying, learning from, and serving our neighbors, following the example of Jesus. God of grace,

**receive our prayer.**

**Here other intercessions may be offered.**

Trusting the assurance of the Holy Spirit, we remember all who have died and rest in God's care. Give hope to those who grieve even as we rest in your eternal promise of resurrection. God of grace,

**receive our prayer.**

Knowing the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, we offer these prayers and the silent prayers of our hearts in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

Hear us now Father, as we pray the words that Christ has taught us,  
**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,  
forever and ever. Amen.**

### **Blessing**

God who names you,  
Christ who claims you,  
and the Holy Spirit who dwells in you,  
✠ bless you and remain with you always.  
**Amen.**

### **Dismissal**

Go in peace. You are God's beloved.  
Thanks be to God.

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