

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, January 12, 2020.

Text: Matthew 3:13-17

Today, we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. And in the season of Epiphany, we can ask the question each week, "What is being revealed about God in our lessons?"

Today we overhear the voice of God from the heavens as Jesus emerges from the waters of baptism, "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Jesus' identity is made clear in his baptism. God the Father's love and approval are openly expressed. The Holy Spirit is present in the form of a dove and the heavens are opened up. Jesus' Baptism essentially connects heaven and earth.

Baptism also marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He is now about 30 years old. The last time we heard from Jesus was at the age of 12. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus was teaching in the temple on one of their family trips to Jerusalem for Passover. So Jesus' baptism marks a new beginning in his life to bring God's kingdom of love and justice to earth.

Jesus' identity becoming clear reminds me of a story I read in Mark Allen Powell's book [Giving to God: The Bible's Good News about living a generous life](#). It is the story of the baptism of the Gaul's. The Gaul's were warlike people who in ancient times inhabited France and Belgium. They spoke the Celtic language and were Druidic by religion. By the time of the Christian era they had been conquered by the Roman Empire. They didn't like that and had a number of uprisings against the Romans.

Christian missionaries ventured into Gallic territory, and over time, many Gaul's became Christians. As the story goes, when a converted Gaul warrior was baptized in a river or stream, he would hold one arm high in the air as the missionary dunked him. This seemed peculiar. The missionaries soon learned the reason why. When the next battle broke out, the warlike Gaul could proclaim "This arm is not baptized!", and then grab his club or sword and destroy his enemy. This might be an urban legend, but the point is the idea of trying to

keep one part of our body, one aspect of our identity, free from the influence of baptism.

Powell says this book is about stewardship, and stewardship is about getting completely wet. It is about looking at ourselves, discovering what it is that we would like to keep dry, and then immersing whatever that is in the waters of Holy Baptism.

Claiming our baptismal identity is about turning total control of our lives over to God... recognizing that everything we have is a gift from God. We will have a lot's of ups and downs in life, wins and losses, successes and failures, but they don't define us. The only constant that will be there for us always is our baptismal identity.

A lot is being revealed about Jesus in his baptism. To me, Jesus' baptism sets the stage of how Jesus will live out his life, death, and resurrection. Jesus first shows that he honors people and their work. Second he shows us that he identifies with us in every way. And third, he calls us to go and do the same.

First of all, Jesus honors John the Baptist's ministry. John's work was to prepare the way for the Messiah to come into the world. John knew that one more powerful than he was coming after him, and he wasn't worthy to carry that one's sandals. When Jesus came to be baptized John rightfully protested saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus said this was in order to fill all righteousness, or justice. So John relented and baptized Jesus. I find this to be true in life, when someone who is above you shows up to honor you and recognize your work. It feels good.

This reminds me of a relay race in track. John was carrying the baton, and when Jesus entered the waters of baptism, the baton was passed on to him. Now in our baptism the baton is passed on to us to carry out Jesus' mission on earth.

The second point I want to make about Jesus' baptism is that he identifies with us humans in every way. Jesus was without sin. He did not have to participate in a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. So why did he do it? It was to fulfill God's justice. Jesus will identify with us sinners in every way throughout

the Gospels. He will take on our sin on the cross in exchange for grace. Jesus demonstrates servant leadership in getting baptized. Our Isaiah text for today speaks of a servant who will come into the world and bring justice to the nations, but without violence and a loud voice. Jesus claims this kind of leadership for himself. He will be light to the nations and hope for the hopeless, but he will do it quietly and faithfully.

Finally, by Jesus getting baptized, we know how important it is for us to be baptized. In our baptism, heaven and earth are connected. God adopts us, names us, and claims us in Jesus Christ. We too receive the Holy Spirit. We receive the promises according to Luther's small catechism of forgiveness of sins, redemption from death and the devil, and eternal salvation.

In Psalm 139, God knit us together in our womb and we are fearfully and wonderfully made. God already loves us. But in baptism, God adopts us in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection, the Bible says.

In our baptism, God names us as beloved children, God is well-pleased with us, and wants us to live completely wet. God wants us to raise our children completely wet, meaning, they know who they are and whose they are.

As baptized children of God, every day is a new day. We are forgiven daily. We can live knowing that God's grace is there waiting for us now and after we die, where we have the promise of eternal life found in Jesus Christ.

Amen.