

The First Sunday after the Epiphany – A (2026)  
The Baptism of our Lord

Isaiah 42:1-9

Psalm 29

Acts 10:34-43

Matthew 3:13-17

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth 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.’”

As we begin our journey through the season of Epiphany, I suspect many of us have focused on the baby Jesus in the manger and the arrival of the Magi as God uses these mysterious ‘men from the east’ to reveal that Jesus’ arrival, God literally ‘with us,’ is for all of humanity, not just the Jews. Today we get another epiphany: the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan as God’s beloved son, who through his baptism, revealed his connection to sinners for whom he came to save, his obedience to the Father, the revelation of the Trinity, and through the lighting of the Spirit, equipping him for his divine mission.

As we celebrate this pivot point in the life and ministry of Jesus, I wonder, do you remember your baptism? I asked this question to a Bible study group this past Friday and not surprisingly, answers ranged from “absolutely” to “I don’t really remember.” I can remember mine as if it happened yesterday. I can tell you that the heavens didn’t open nor did I hear the voice of God, but with the maturity of my 13 years, I do remember thinking “I wonder where we are going to go to lunch afterwards to celebrate?”

That said, I remember vividly the space, the temperature of the water, what I was wearing, the mosaic tile on the back wall and the question of Dr. Christians when he asked me if I wanted to be baptized. With my consent, he immersed me in the waters of that warm and inviting baptistry with the words, “you are now dead unto

sin and alive unto Christ,” followed by the Trinitarian formula, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” With these words and actions, the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace, we call a sacrament, I became the newest member of the Sacramento First Baptist Church.

Truth be told, I really didn’t know what being baptized meant other than I was now officially a member of the church and could fully participate in the monthly communion services. I grew up in a faith tradition where baptism was for those who were mature enough to confess a belief in Jesus Christ. We did not baptize infants, nor could anyone make baptismal promises on behalf of another. To be baptized represented a public profession to a personal relationship with God, certainly one forged and shaped by intentional theological education and community support, but personal in substance.

Why is baptism so important? Whether you remember your baptism or not, something transformational happened to you and me. Like Jesus, we were infused with the Spirit from God. The evidence of this transformation is the subsequent life you and I have lived as Christians irrespective of whether we responded to the calling of the Spirit to the waters of baptism or the promises of a Christian life were made for us in infant baptism. All of us who now identify with the Risen Christ have been baptized “into” him. Something fundamentally happened that changed who we are now becoming from who we were then. The continuing unfolding of what it means to live as a baptized Christian plays out every day. In baptism, we are a new creation, a new being, and we embody a new identity.

Why is this new identity so important? Because it marks us as people who live a particular way of life. Baptism is a metaphorical “drowning,” a sacrament by which we put to death an old way of life. Our new way of life calls us to reorient our thinking away from the culture that surrounds us. This new life of discipleship demands that we continually reprioritize what is important to us. Whatever we used to value, whatever we used to worship, whatever used to give meaning and structure in our lives must be kept in proper order considering our commitment to serve the Risen Lord first and foremost; this is what it means to identify with Christ through the waters of baptism. This revaluing process goes on all the time,

and it challenges our commitments and relationships that try and crowd their way in front of our commitment to Christ.

By our consenting to being joined ‘in’ Christ through baptism, we commit ourselves to lives grounded in lifelong learning about the ways of God; of resisting evil, and when we fail, to repent and ask for God grace to amend our lives; to proclaim by word and deed the Good News of God in Christ; to seek and serve God in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves, as we strive for justice and peace among all people. Our commitment to those promises is one thing; to enact them is quite another, and it is only by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit that we are able. Consenting to living a life ‘in’ Christ is one grounded in sacrificial service to God and others.

Our new baptismal identity in Christ helps keep our eyes and ears open for the inbreaking of the Holy Spirit all around us. This new identity continually tears away at the habits that seek to put ourselves first, our wants and needs before those of others. This new identity breathed into us by God, this *ruach Yahweh*, creates in us new and exciting desires to serve others, it inspires us to learn and grow and love and to live the abundant life that God wants and promises for each of us.

Today’s gospel reading offers some truly good news: that in our baptism, we become transformed people; that the gift of God’s Spirit empowers us in becoming new creations; and in following Jesus’ call on our life, we take on a new identity. But there’s more: this new spirit, life, and identity come to us, not by anything we’ve done, but by the sheer grace and love of God. But there’s more: we don’t have to wait for the Sundays when we renew our baptismal vows, we don’t have to live under undue pressure to live as ‘perfect’ Christians, and we don’t have to do anything other than to consent, to say ‘yes’ to Christ’s call on our lives. Our age can’t hinder us nor can our health. Our financial status or whether we are single or married doesn’t matter. Jesus just bids us, as he did with John, to “let it be so now.” In the few moments after this homily, I encourage you to contemplate this renewing of your consent as we prepare to celebrate the Eucharist and as you come

forward to accept Christ's broken body and shed blood, a willing gift of himself to each of us.

My friends.... (story about baptism practicum) Baptism is wet, exhilarating, and soaked to the bone in God's love....and that's what the baptized life is all about. So, I invite us to return metaphorically and spiritually to the waters of baptism and relish getting wet once again. Let God's waters of love wash away all the "stuff" that holds us back, that challenges and distracts us from God, and those things that creates fear and anxiety within us. I ask that you not just wade into the water, but splash and dive into the deep end; and when you're done, to rest and float in the stillness of God's peace.