

The First Sunday after Epiphany: “Baptized as a Child of God”

Gen 1:1-5; Ps 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mk 1:4-11

The first Sunday that occurs after the Feast of Epiphany (which always falls on January 6th the thirteenth day after Christmas) and is always celebrated by the Church as the “Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ.” As we commemorate the momentous event of the Baptism of Jesus, I thought I would offer you something to ponder, something to think upon, not just this week, but throughout the coming weeks.

Your first task is to consider: What *is* Baptism? What does Baptism really mean to you? Is Baptism an Act of Membership Initiation? Is baptism something to be done because, well, “everybody does it?” Do you think that “getting baptized” gets you a First-Class ticket to heaven? And why even get baptized at all?

These are challenging questions and therein lies the problem, because baptism is not really about *us*. Baptism is about God and what God is doing. Baptism is a holy, ineffable mystery. And, as we read in Mark’s Gospel passage for today, Jesus himself was “baptized.”

Perhaps we might consider this: God himself took a simple bath. God participated in a relatively common Jewish cleansing ritual and changed it into a marvelous, divine mystery of grace and love. Baptism is a divine mystery that I suspect our mere human understanding can never quite grasp or at least not on this side of life. All that we can understand is that “baptism” is somehow holy and mysterious. “Baptism” is God in action and in a wondrous way, we get to participate in God’s action.

Today, we remember that Jesus was baptized and he was made known to us as the “Son of God.” Today we remember that we too have been baptized and that we too are “marked and sealed” as the holy sons and daughters of God. And we too will know eternal life in the eternal love of God.

In our respective baptisms, and in every baptism in which we participate thereafter, we mysteriously get to participate in the very life of God himself. We get to be a part of God’s Story. Baptism elevates us to another plane of existence—something holy, something outside of time and space. Baptisms

remind us that God chose to become one of us, with the express purpose of participating in our life so that we could become part of God and God's own life.

Since this Sunday is always considered a "Baptismal Feast," we would ordinarily "Renew" our own Baptismal Vows. I encourage you to turn to page 292 in your *Book of Common Prayer [BCP]* and to read through those Baptismal Vows. If you do not have a BCP you may go to our main webpage which will have a downloadable page with these most important affirmations of our Christian faith.

I challenge you: I dare you to let go, to let go of all logic and earthly, creaturely, earthbound control. I dare you to let go and to let God touch you, even if it's just a small shiver or flicker of awareness of God's divine presence there *within* you. I dare you to listen to God affirm you right now as His most beloved sons and daughters; not because we have earned it and certainly not because we deserve it, but simply because God loves us, each one of us enough to be a *part* of God's divine story.

*"Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his Name;
worship the LORD in the Beauty of holiness." Ps 29.2*

What are the implications and meanings for you in today's readings?

1. Although our Old Testament passage is quite short, take time to meditate on each phrase.
 - a. How does God "create"?
 - b. What was there before God created "light"?
2. In Mark's Gospel, John the Baptist is baptizing people with water in the River Jordan. However, John claims that one comes after him [Jesus] who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.
 - a. Spend some time thinking about what it means to be "baptized with the Holy Spirit."
 - b. What does it mean to you to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God?
3. Contemplate the powerful message that John the Baptist must have been preaching to attract people coming from miles away, across desert and prairie-like terrain, just to hear him.

For the Biblical Scholars

- Why do you think our Genesis passage is paired with this Gospel passage?
- Our reading from *Acts* recounts Paul's interaction with "disciples" who had not received the "Holy Spirit" at their Baptism. Why had they not received the Holy Spirit?
- What is the difference between: the "baptism of John" and the "baptism of Jesus"?