

SERMON – 1 Epiphany, Baptism of our Lord
January 10, 2010
Isaiah 43:1-7
Psalm 29
Acts 8:14-17
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

On this first Sunday after the Epiphany, we celebrate each year the Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. Today is one of the times that it is appropriate to have a baptism, but as we do not have one scheduled for today we will renew our own baptismal vows in place of saying the Nicene Creed.

Baptism is one of the 7 sacraments of the church. Does anyone remember what the other 6 sacraments are? They are The Holy Eucharist, Confirmation, Holy Matrimony, Ordination, Reconciliation of a penitent, and Unction, which is anointing the sick with oil. Both Baptism and The Holy Eucharist are considered the two sacraments of the Gospel given by Christ to his church.

None of us probably remembers our own baptism, because it is more than likely that we were all baptized as infants and our parents and godparents made promises on our behalf. Does anyone remember who their godparents are? Were they a significant part of your life growing up?

It would be good that if we are sponsors or godparents that we should try to be a significant part of our godchildren's lives. We should remember to send a card on the date of their baptism; call them up to find out how they are doing, because we made promises on their behalf at the time of their baptism, and it is our

responsibility to help them grow in the knowledge and love of God.

Since we are celebrating Jesus' baptism today, I thought it would be good to talk a little about baptism in general and what it means to us as Christians.

Baptism is about saying, “**Yes**” to being part of the Christian faith, and our parents made this decision for those of us who were baptized as infants. Baptism says that we want to be initiated into a life in Christ, and it becomes a turning point in our life and marks the beginning of the journey of faith and discipleship. Being baptized allows us to partake of the banquet at the Lord's Table, and it is through baptism that we become a part of the community of God, the Church.

As you know, water is a very important part of baptism; it is the outward and visible sign. When we pour water in the font at baptism, we are telling two stories of God's community where water is very significant.

The first story is that creation begins with water. On the very first page of our Bible, we read that the ‘Spirit of God was hovering over the waters’, and then we read how God let the water under the sky be gathered to one place and let dry ground appear. Water is a gift from God. We know the importance of rivers and seas and oceans and how without these we could not survive. We see how God continues to nourish and sustain all living things through the gift of water. And even though water is a gift from God, we know that there are places in this world where some people have very little water and they have to walk miles just to get a pail of water to last them for the day. In developed countries where we tend to take water for granted, we should always remember that it is a gift and treat it as such.

The other story that we remember as we pour water into the font is about the flight of the children of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land. They were in the desert, they were slaves living in bondage under the rule of Pharaoh and God chose Moses to lead them from slavery into a life of freedom. In their flight from Egypt they are being pursued by Pharaoh's army and in front of them was this vast expanse of water. How were they going to get away from the army, how were they going to successfully cross this expanse of water? This is where God acted to save the children of Israel. God gave Moses the power to part the raging waters which allowed them to cross safely to the other side and as soon as the enemy came to the banks of the river they were engulfed by the water. This experience of the children of Israel was to them a death and resurrection experience. They were able to risk death in the water to come through to find new life and new beginnings in the land that God promised to give to them. They left behind their days of slavery to find freedom.

These two age-old stories are ever present with us today in baptism. Water is an element in God's creation; it means birth and it means life; it means death and resurrection. When we are washed in the waters of baptism, we receive new life and new birth as a new Christian. To obtain freedom and new life we risk death of the old life, and we rise again in the resurrection of Jesus.

We have seen the outward and visible sign of baptism in the use of water. The next thing we do in baptism is to anoint and mark the sign of the cross on the newly baptized person. We now want the baptized person to become a part of the Household of God, and we do this by anointing them with oil and marking their forehead with the sign of the cross by saying, "*You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever.*" The mark of the cross is the symbol of the central event in Jesus' life, his death and resurrection, and we have offered the baptized

person to our Lord Jesus Christ and they are now identified with Jesus for the rest of their life.

Do you remember what the definition of a sacrament is? *“Sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.”* So the outward and visible sign of a Baptism is the pouring on of water, and the inward and spiritual grace in Baptism is union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God’s family the Church, forgiveness of sins, and new life in the Holy Spirit. This act can never be undone, even if later in life we should decide to leave the Christian faith; we are still a baptized person who has been sealed by the Holy Spirit as Christ’s own forever. This can never be undone.

In Luke’s version of Jesus’ baptism that we just heard in the gospel reading, we get a very clear picture of the Trinity as we are told that a voice came from heaven, the voice of God the Father, saying to Jesus the Son, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased,” and then the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove. We also see Jesus’ humanity and divinity revealed to us.

Baptism unites us all with Christ and with each other, and we are united with all those other Christians who have come and gone before us and all those yet to come. We are now members of a new family, the Body of Christ. We come together with all our gifts and talents, with all our hurts and joys, and with all our imperfections, to be the Body of Christ, the Church.

Everyone should have received a cup with some water in it. Let us think of this water that you are holding as being a part of us; after all we are mostly made up of water anyway. Water is life giving, it refreshes, it brings new birth, it unites us with Christ. I invite you to reflect on what we heard this morning about baptism; think about what our baptism means to us today; think about the

importance of water in our lives; think about how much God loves each of us and how he claims us at our baptism.

Now I would like you all to come forward to pour your water into the font. By each of us pouring our water into the font, we are giving of ourselves to be the Body of Christ. We are uniting ourselves with each other here today; we love and care for each other just as Christ loves and cares for each of us. Water has a new meaning for us, not only does it bring us together in our baptism, but we know that it is a gift from God which is life-sustaining. We also understand more fully that being sealed by the Holy Spirit at baptism, we become a part of the Household of God, we no longer have to act on our own; we are a child of God. We are united. Together we all make up the Body of Christ, the Church, and together the light of Christ will shine brightly through us for the entire world to see.

Amen.