

Baptism of our Lord- Year C  
First Sunday After the Epiphany  
Holy Family, Laurel Springs  
January 9, 2022

May 13, 1962...anyone want to take a guess at the significance of this date? No, it's not my birthdate. It's my "rebirth" date. It is the day that my parents, my grandparents, and my godparents took me to church, at one day and one month old, dressed in an heirloom family baptismal gown and presented me for Baptism. I was named and they promised that I would be raised in the faith. I began my Christian journey that day. Eleven years later, I presented myself for Confirmation because, as Bishop Stokes said recently at my niece's Confirmation to the parents and godparents, "We are here today because you kept your promise." Do any of you know your baptismal date without looking it up? I know Cathy Brackin does! Do you remember who was there? Do you remember any of the details? If you were baptized as an infant, probably not. But if you were baptized as an older child or as an adult, you most likely have very vivid memories.

The observance of the Baptism of our Lord is an opportune time for us all to consider our own baptisms and ask how this event has affected our lives. Baptism, no matter when it

occurred - as an infant, a child, a teen or an adult - is, in fact, a turning point moment. Baptism confers upon us our identity in Christ, cleanses us from the taint of sin and delivers us into the fullness of new birth into the body of Christ. It's a big deal!

Baptism calls us all into service in Christ's name. We are all ministers of the Gospel by virtue of this baptism; no matter whether we are lay or ordained persons. According to the "Outline of the Faith" (The Catechism) in The Book of Common Prayer, "*The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons.*" Did you hear that? Who is listed first. That's right, the laity. YOU ARE! The catechism teaches that the ministry of the laity is, "*to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.*" (BCP p. 855).

Now that we understand a little more about our own baptism, let's talk about Jesus'. We will focus especially on what the Evangelist Luke has to say about it in today's Gospel reading. When He presented Himself to his cousin John on the banks of the Jordan River, he was performing the first public act of his ministry.

It is for this reason that the Gospel reading for the First Sunday after the Epiphany is always an account of Jesus' Baptism. All three of the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which I just read, all give accounts of the Baptism of Jesus as the first event of his ministry and while the Gospel of John does not include the Baptism, it does allude to the event. Since all four Gospel writers include this event, it is a very noteworthy event. It is something that they want their readers to know about and to remember.

Considering how much detail Luke includes in his retelling of Jesus' birth narrative, we all know the story by heart, Luke has very little to share when recalling the events of Jesus' baptism. With very few words, Luke will transition from the end of John's preaching mission to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus' baptism is the necessary hinge. Luke has people wondering if John might be the Messiah. John lets them know in no uncertain terms that HE IS NOT. He tells them that one more powerful than he is coming, one who is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

According to Luke, all we know about the Baptism of Jesus is that it was with "**all the people**", something that maybe the church has forgotten. Jesus presented himself to his cousin John for baptism as an act of solidarity with a nation and with a world of

sinners. Jesus simply got in line with everyone else. When those who had been beaten up by this selfish and sinful world formed a line in hopes of a new beginning and a return to God, Jesus joined them. He identified with the damaged, the marginalized, and the broken people who needed God.

Did Jesus need to be baptized by John? The baptism John offered was one of repentance. We believe that Jesus was without sin. So why then, did he offer himself for baptism? Theologian William Barkley offers this explanation. It goes back to the concept of a hinge. In the life of every human being, there are certain, definitive stages, certain hinges on with their entire life hangs. It is also true of Jesus' life. The first big event of His life was when, at the age of twelve, he separates Himself from his parents and He visits the Temple in Jerusalem. While speaking there with the teachers, He discovers His unique relationship to God, His father. But it takes another 18 years of working as a carpenter with Joseph in Nazareth for Jesus to emerge and take up his rightful mission. He must have been waiting for some sign. John's message and the people who flocked to hear him and be baptized by him were this catalyst. Throughout the whole country there was an unprecedented movement towards God. Jesus knew that his time had come. It was not that he was conscious of sin and

the need for repentance. It was that he knew he also must join this movement towards God. For Jesus, the emergence of John was God's call to action; and his first step was to identify himself with the people in their search for God.

In Jesus' baptism, something happened. Before He could take this tremendous, all-important step and begin his ministry, Jesus had to be certain He was right; and in the moment of baptism, God, His Father, spoke to Him. This was an experience personal to Jesus. The voice of God came to Him and confirmed things for Him. He had made the correct decision. **"You are my Son, the Beloved: with you I am well pleased."** This saying is composed of two Old Testament texts. The first part – "YOU are my beloved Son"- is from Psalm 2:7 and was always accepted as a description of the Messianic King. The second part- "in you I am well pleased" is part of Isaiah 42:1 and is from a description of the Lord's suffering servant who suffers in Isaiah 53. So, in His baptism, Jesus is made to realize that first, He is the Messiah, God's Anointed King; and second, that this did not involve power and glory, but suffering and a cross. Jesus asks for God's approval and receives the destiny of the cross.

So why was this event so important that all four Gospel writers included it? What importance does it have for us? Jesus' baptism is the **BEGINNING** of His ministry. It is his commissioning to begin the public ministry for which he was created and to which he was called. It was the beginning of his teaching ministry. It was the beginning of his healing ministry. It was the beginning of his changing history forever. It was the beginning of a remarkable journey that would lead him to the cross and beyond. It was the beginning of his saving of the world. But, he does not undertake all of this on with his own power and abilities. The source of His strength will be beyond himself. The Holy Spirit will support and encourage Him all the way, even when things become difficult.

So, I have five questions for you this morning. I have every confidence that you know the answers. If you are uncertain, Please join me on pages 304-305 in the Book of Common Prayer.

**Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?**

I will, with God's help.

**Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?**

I will, with God's help.

**Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?**

I will, with God's help.

**Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?**

I will, with God's help.

**Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?**

I will, with God's help.

Just as Jesus did, we do don't rely on ourselves or own power and abilities when we do God's work in the world. Just like Jesus, the source of our strength is beyond ourselves. We resist evil, we proclaim the Good News, and work for justice, peace, and dignity for all, **with God's help!**

Our baptism and subsequent confirmation are not simply about our profession of faith. It is not the end of our journey. We are "not done." These sacraments are important markers that send us out into a new form of ministry and a new way of being faithful. They are about our continued growth in our understanding of what God is calling us to do as we live out our

identities as children of God. Through our baptisms, we are gifted with that same source of strength and encouragement that Jesus received in His. God has said to us, “You are my Son. You are my Daughter. You are chosen. I delight in you. With you I am well pleased.” It is my prayer for all of us that our lives reflect this gift that we have so graciously received.

AMEN.