

Encounters with Jesus – His Baptism  
Baptism of the Lord Sunday  
January 12, 2020  
Matthew 3:13-17  
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Matthew 3:13-17 (NRSV) [‘

The Baptism of Jesus

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. <sup>16</sup> And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved,<sup>[a]</sup> with whom I am well pleased.”

It’s not always easy to understand “just what is this season of Epiphany *supposed* to be about?” We’re in these weeks between the two *highest* holy days we celebrate – Christmas and Easter. Before each of those celebrations, during Advent AND Lent, we are in times of preparing for the celebrations of the birth of Jesus AND the celebration of his resurrection.

But Epiphany.

Depends on who you ask, I guess.

And since I shared with you that my WORD for 2020 is “notice” – that I want to be aware about noticing God’s Presence, the one comment I *noticed* as I prepared for today, and want to share with you, is that Epiphany is our time to search for, discover, and consider the ways Jesus is made known in Scripture.

And, since we’re ALL students of God’s Word, (right?), how is Jesus STILL being made known to us today?

In the coming Sundays we’re going to explore encounters with Jesus that we have in Scripture and how those affect our daily lives.

These encounters should change us...at least *make us wonder*. And because there are so many ways that we can (and will in this season) encounter and identify with Jesus, our task is to discover HOW we identify with him.  
Who WE say he is and what that means in our lives.

Today's reading is about Jesus' "coming out party."  
It's such an important event that all four gospel writers recorded it in their books. It's really the initiation into Jesus ministry and points toward his crucifixion. That's quite an encounter for us to notice!

And, when we think about baptism (all the things we've read and studied), there isn't *any* reason for Jesus to BE baptized.

There's confusion – depending upon who you ask.

"Are you a follower of Jesus Christ?"

Some people will respond, "Yes. I was baptized when I was little."

And that's okay – it's just God's Word doesn't teach that **baptism** saves us.

Baptism isn't where we **find** Jesus.

It's what, if we were baptized as infants, that our parents initiated us into – to be seekers to know Jesus.

Or, if you recall being baptized, it's what you did ONCE YOU FOUND HIM!

The wise men "found" Jesus – as we celebrated last Sunday – and they began the "rest of time" process of revealing Jesus to all nations. We're still a part of that revelation!

This week, the key players are Jesus and his cousin, John the Baptizer.

I think it's important that we remember that John didn't "just come up" with the baptism idea. He wasn't just preaching one day and said, "Hey let's go into the water. I'll dunk some of you guys. It'll be fun."

In fact, John, as you heard David read, was hesitant about the order of the details of Jesus' baptism. He didn't feel worthy to DO THE BAPTIZING.

John felt unworthy...that he was “just” (as “only” a prophet would) supposed to prepare the way for the Messiah...to prepare others for the Messiah’s coming. Remember from our Advent-time readings that John LEAPT in his mother’s womb (remember?) when pregnant Mary, the mother of Jesus, entered the room. JOHN KNEW before he was born! He’d had a v-e-r-y early encounter with the Messiah and HE KNEW the seriousness of preparing others for their own encounters soon to come!

And here comes Jesus; he presents himself to be baptized.

He doesn’t have the need to be baptized as the folks John was talking to – or us either.

He doesn’t need to repent – to turn to a new direction – like we do.

If we think that the ONLY reason for baptism is to wash away sin, then why does Jesus need to be baptized?

Do you recall the movie “Oh Brother, Where Art Thou”?

It’s about three convicts who come across a bunch of people being baptized in the river.

One of the guys, Delmar, gets all excited and he runs out in the river and gets baptized. He comes out of the water and says, “*All my sins and **transmissions** have been washed away! Even that Piggly Wiggly I robbed over in Yazoo – that’s been washed away.*”

One of the other convicts says, “*Delmar, I thought you said you were innocent of those charges!*”

To which Delmar replies, “*I lied – and that’s been washed away, too!*”

So if Jesus was without sin, why was he baptized?

He didn’t need to get back on track.

It’s an important question.

Jesus’ baptism **does** change the direction of his life, but not because of sin.

Jesus’ direction is into ministry and towards, as we know, his death.

**And** it helps US to understand OUR baptisms.



Take a look at the front of your bulletin. This illustration is the cover of our Upper Room devotional. Talk about A LOT of things to *notice!* Thankfully, someone else interprets the cover artwork in each edition!

Can't you imagine though, a voice (God's voice) surrounding Jesus as he rises up out of the water? I wonder, did boom or was it powerfully quiet: "This is my beloved Son..."

Then, do you notice, in the picture, the Spirit hovering over Jesus? Jesus' arms have the same shape of the dove. And how he must have looked stretched out on the cross; arms spread, head hanging down. Look, too, and his feet are on top of each other like on the cross.

The artist, Daniel Bonnell, piled a lot into his painting to help us *encounter* Jesus at his baptism.

He helps us see how we're connected with Christ AT BAPTISM and with our promised resurrection.

When Jesus asked John to baptize him he had to encourage John with "allow it now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness."

Jesus was being obedient and humble to do what God asked. God required it.

And, Jesus lived his life in complete obedience to God. No one else can say that. Jesus can.

And he knew what this EVENT *would lead to.*

But do we?

Do we *notice*, in this encounter with Jesus, what it's for?

This coming out party...

...this inauguration began a *really* big AND OBEDIENT commitment to God's plan FOR you and me.

I read about a mom who had to take her daughter to the doctor. The little girl needed a shot to make her better but she looked at her mommy and asked, "Is it going to hurt."

The sweet mama thought, "Darn tootin' it's gonna hurt. There's going to be crying like a stuck pig!" But she didn't say that. Instead she said, "No honey, there's nothing to it" and asked the doctor to give HER a shot first to show the child that it wasn't too bad.

She put herself in her child's shoes to show her the way.

Jesus took HIS step of obedience to show us the way...

...to identify with US who **do** need to repent and turn a different direction.

Jesus showed us humility and commitment – which is, in its simplest reasoning, what baptism is about.

Jesus did it for us.

Baptism is about God's grace – working IN us.

It's about what God IS DOING FOR US ....not what we're doing for God.

Grace has been at work for us before we're ever aware of it.

Since day one and BEFORE day one, God is already working grace through us, calling us into a relationship WITH God.

So, in Jesus' baptism, there's one more thing.

There's humility and commitment – but also identification.

Look again at that picture.

Jesus comes up out of the water and a "a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am will pleased."

What stands out is that God's words to Jesus is that God is *already* well-pleased with Jesus.

It's a pre-existing condition.

Jesus is at the start of his ministry.

He's ABOUT to do miracles and teaching and leading and touching and healing – but it hasn't happened yet.

But these words, from God, they don't come in the middle or the end of Jesus' journey. They come at the beginning!  
It's something that is ALREADY true.

Jesus is ALREADY God's Beloved...JUST BECAUSE Jesus is the child of God.

What does that mean for us, Children of God?

Hmmm?

That's what we celebrate in OUR baptism.

It's a reminder for us that God speaks to us and says, "YOU (and you and you) are my child, my beloved, with YOU I am well pleased.

Whether or not we've ever felt – or are feeling – that our relationship with God is different than Jesus had with his Abba – *some things are VERY MUCH the same.*

God's love for us is a pre-existing condition.

It's unshakable...since our very beginning – not at, or until, the end of OUR journey after determining whether we measure up or not.

We're God's.

With us, God is well-pleased, simply because God loves us.

We're just a few days into the new year and new decade.

Perhaps the resolutions we made have fallen away.

But, I still have (and think you should too) expectations that, with each encounter we have with Jesus...whether in our study of Scripture or in *noticing* something that can only have been Spirit-given in our day-to-day living, that we can still have hope that with God's grace we can change.

We can do new things.

We can make a difference in our world.

Perhaps, as a friend told me, resolutions should *shift*.

Shift away from thinking "my resolve wasn't enough" or "my strength and will-power let me down" and instead remember that God already loves us.

And from there we have ALL we need to exceed our expectations.  
All in God's love.

Today we've remembered Jesus' baptism and re-affirmed our own.  
Today we have, in this encounter with Jesus, the opportunity, if we've forgotten,  
to remember the love that God has for us...  
...that we are God's own children...  
...that God pours God's grace out into us...  
...and we can recommit ourselves to God's plan for our lives.

An encounter with Jesus...

Amen