

Knowing Jesus in Epiphany
Our Baptism
First Sunday of Epiphany
Luke 3:14-17, 21-22
January 13, 2019
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Luke 3:15-27 (NRSV)

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah,^[a] ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with^[b] the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

¹⁸ So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. ¹⁹ But Herod the ruler,^[c] who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰ added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

The Baptism of Jesus

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved;^[d] with you I am well pleased.”^[e]

The Ancestors of Jesus

²³ Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work. He was the son (as was thought) of Joseph son of Heli, ²⁴ son of Matthat, son of Levi, son of Melchi, son of Jannai, son of Joseph, ²⁵ son of Mattathias, son of Amos, son of Nahum, son of Esli, son of Naggai, ²⁶ son of Maath, son of Mattathias, son of Semein, son of Josech, son of Joda, ²⁷ son of Joanan, son of Rhesa, son of Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel,^[f] son of Neri,

Last week we talked about the definition of Epiphany being an insight or inspiration.

And, that all these years after the magi followed a star “light” we’ve STILL got to lift our eyes and look around so that we don’t get used to the darkness or give in to complacency that won’t make the darkness better.

Continuing today, to Know Jesus in Epiphany, I want to talk about Jesus’ baptism and what it means and the place to start, of course, is with the Scripture passage that Ann just read. This account is also, with more details, in the Gospel of Matthew.

John the Baptizer is at the Jordan River, near the place where the Israelites cross over into the Promised Land. (There's an image in itself, for an entire sermon!)

John was Jesus' hide-wearin', locust-eatin' cousin remember?

And, he preached about repentance and the harsh reality of judgment.

After he'd preached repentance he (if you can call it this) encouraged people with what they needed to do if they wanted to live IN their repentance.

I wonder, sometimes as I'm reading these passages, what John the Baptizer must have been thinking right then.

When Jesus comes up and is wiping the water out of his eyes, and the heavens were opened (it says with the details of Matthew) and Jesus saw the Spirit descend like a dove...what could John have been thinking? With his mouth open in awe? His shoulders shrugged up against his ears?

What the....?

His message WAS COMING TRUE....even while still in his mother's body, John had been telling people to "prepare the way of the Lord." AND WHOA, here it was happening!

So, here we are, at THE place, at the Jordan River that Jesus comes to be baptized.

And today is the day, especially, that we need to remember that our basic understanding of baptism AND our own baptisms come from Jesus, and from THIS very experience of **his** baptism.

What happened HERE, and then what happened after, because of his baptism, DIDN'T happen to anyone else John baptized.

Now, the first thing we should recall is that when Jesus was baptized, no one told him what to do.

John the Baptizer didn't tell him what to do (and John *loved* to tell absolutely everybody else *exactly* what to do!) But not Jesus.

And God the Father didn't tell Jesus what to do, either.

When you take a look, again, at these verses, you should take note of that. No one told Jesus what to do.

What God the Father did tell Jesus was **who** Jesus was,

“You are my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

But, when we look closer, there’s nothing in here about:

- what Jesus was supposed to do,
- about what it looked like for him to be the beloved, the uniquely named Son of the Father,
- OR how to live out THAT identity.

I hadn’t thought about that [enough] before working again in these verses for today.

Jesus had to work ALL THAT out **for** himself...and **by** himself.

Now, we know that Jesus was a real HUMAN person who had to make real HUMAN decisions, right? He was like us. He wasn’t a puppet....and he wasn’t “just” God the Father in a flesh-suit. He was born of a woman – he was human.

So, the Man, Jesus, had some options AND EXPECTATIONS in front of him. He *could* decide what it would mean for him to be the Messiah.

Now, to be clear, Jesus **did** have some parameters:

- of his human culture and traditions
- and the expectations that the ancestors of his family and his nation who **all** had ideas about what Messiah would be....the Beloved.

But, there’s more.

If we think about it, many of those parameters are still with US.

And, as I mentioned earlier, we’ve got to look UP into the Word of God and not be pulled into misinformation about who Jesus was (AND IS) or what Jesus did or did not choose to do.

‘Cause Jesus did CHOOSE.

After the voice of God the Father “marked” Jesus as “beloved” there were some places he could have looked to determine what that meant.

He COULD have looked up and saw the flabbergasted John the Baptize and stopped right there.

Hey, he could live the same kind of rigid, weird-diet-life John did and preached fire and brimstone like John preached.

Jesus, like his cousin, could have just had a ministry among the people of Israel and waited *with them*.

That wouldn't have been unusual. A lot of people thought the Messiah **would be** JUST like that.

Jesus could have looked there and chose that.

Or he could have thought about the issues of the day and looked over at the shore of the Jordan and become an anti-Roman agitator, maybe like the Zealots, who were a “nationalist party” that (pretty much) invented guerrilla warfare.

Jesus could have organized his OWN army and used force to restore the heritage God had promised to the people.

Jesus *could have* made the same promises for military victory, economic prosperity, and national greatness. That's what “everybody” thought the Messiah WOULD do.

It would happen eventually. We know historically that within just a generation the Zealots were in a full military revolt against Rome.

Jesus could have looked there.

Or he could have looked into the scrolls of the Torah or other books in our Old Testament and picked any one of the images from there- that tell of what it looks like to be the beloved of God the Father.

There was David and even David's son, Solomon or the other “good” kings throughout Israel's history that could have been his model.

These beloved were successful soldiers and politicians; even known *outside* the boards of Israel!

And Jesus could have recalled that those men were symbols and reminders of Israel's great past.

People wanted the good old days back and thought the Messiah would bring them. Jesus could have chosen THAT option.

Or Jesus could have looked at another OT book, of Daniel, and read (like we can) of the God's vision for triumph.

Or read anywhere IN HERE [Bible] about when God suddenly appears in REAL history and brings about judgement so that evil is wiped out.

That was a popular hope among a few people that Jesus knew about.

Oh, and by the way, we've got to remember THEY knew about Jesus, too.

These are just a few of the choices Jesus could have made.

And when we study God's Word, we find a lot more, too.

These were popular visions of who and what the Messiah would be on the day that Jesus came up out of the water of the Jordan River.

There were even self-proclaimed messiahs who tried to make themselves fit into those ideas.

Now, I'm not going to get Facebook-y or google-search-y on you, but these options are still with us. I'm not kidding!

There are people out there who want to pretend that Jesus and his Church are about preaching morality or causing social reform.

Others want to gain their own personal prosperity or bring back the good old days.

And others still are just hanging around until God shuts it ALL down with Armageddon.

Make no mistake – and don't forget to look toward THE LIGHT to see that all of these ideas are still around today, just like they were around for Jesus.

We don't have a John the Baptizer issuing warnings...but we do have voices like Billy and Franklin Graham.

We could all be better voices crying out to "*prepare for the RETURN of the Messiah!*" We could be a voice

But back to Jesus and his options.

Dear Ones, Jesus didn't choose any of those options to tell him who and what Beloved was.

He didn't choose any of those options.

Guided by the Spirit that descended onto him in the Jordan, Jesus did go to the Scriptures for *his* answer of what it meant to be the beloved of God the Father.

He went to a generally ignored, fairly obscure part of the Bible, where, up to this point in the Story of God's people, not too many had paid much attention.

Jesus went to the poetry called "servant songs" in the book of the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah's writing there are four powerful and yes, puzzling poems.

And in those passages, God's chosen one is portrayed not as a conquering king, but as a servant: gentle, patient, and burdened with pain.

God's servant mysteriously (make that miraculously) and through his obedient suffering, redeems not only Israel, the nation of God's chosen people, but all of humanity.

It's in these passages of an ancient, historically real person who loved the nation of Israel, who I would call that a "beloved" by God, too, that Isaiah wrote that the servant of God, the Beloved, wasn't going to fill any of the popular expectations of WHO the Messiah would be.

Instead, it's written, the Servant would embrace a faithful obedience that would lead, ONLY THROUGH GREAT AFFLICTION, to his justification **and** to the victory of God.

When Jesus came out of the Jordan at *his* baptism, he was given his identity just like we are at our own baptisms.

Admittedly, I've never heard A VOICE proclaim who someone is when we've witnessed a baptism, BUT it happened FOR Jesus: he was named beloved of God.

And dear ones, SO ARE WE.

Jesus had to decide where to look to discover how he was to live out the identity given to him that day. There were lots of options; there still are.

On this Sunday that we remember Jesus' baptism, our Church calendar wants us to reaffirm our own Baptismal Covenant, so that we are reminded – I pray for today and all the days to come - that we, too, have been named beloved of God

And that we, like Jesus, HAVE to live that *calling out*...EVERY DAY.
Day by day.

What does that look like?

What will that look like today and for the rest of our lives?

'Cause we have options.

And, like Jesus, WE HAVE GOT TO CHOOSE.

How will we go? Or behave? Or serve?

We've got to choose – like Jesus did.

God the Father won't ask us to take the exact same option that Jesus did because Jesus has already given the one-and-only sacrifice that was required...He chose it...FOR US.

Of all the options he could have taken, he chose the image of the suffering servant, the one who gives up everything for the sake of faithful obedience to God's Word.

Today, this is our challenge:

Will WE choose Jesus and his vision; the vision of God the Father; to be redeemed and share in eternal life?

And will we, in our own "image of serving" share that same message with others?

That's our challenge and our glory, Beloved.

Amen.

Will you please join Ann and me, to use the insert in your bulletin and share together the Reaffirmation of Baptism liturgy.

New Service of Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant

All standing in body and/or spirit.

Sisters and brothers in Christ:

through the sacrament of baptism God's Spirit has been poured out upon water,
water poured over and immersing us,
water that flows freely for all who will receive it,
water from the streams of God's saving power and justice,
water that brings hope to all who thirst for righteousness,
water that refreshes life, nurtures growth, and offers new birth.

Today we come to the waters, to renew our commitments
in each other's presence, to Christ who has raised us, the Spirit who has birthed us, and the
Creator who is making all things new.

Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith

And so I ask you, will you turn away from the powers of sin and death?

We renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of our sin!

Will you let the Spirit use you as prophets to the powers that be?

We accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves!

Will you proclaim the good news and live as disciples of Jesus Christ, his body on earth?

We confess Jesus Christ as our Savior, put our whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as our Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races!

Will you be living witnesses to the gospel, individually and together, wherever you are, and in all that you do?

We will remain faithful members of Christ's holy church and serve as Christ's representatives in the world.

Will you receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?

We affirm and teach the faith of the whole church as we put our trust in God, the Father Almighty, in Jesus Christ, his only Son, and in the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.

Thanksgiving Over the Water

The Spirit of the Lord is with us.

Even so, come Lord Jesus!

Let us pray.

Almighty God, the life you birthed in us by baptism into Jesus Christ will never die. Your justice never fails.

Your mercy is everlasting.

Your healing river flows. Your Spirit blows where you will.

We cannot stop you, God!

But sometimes we try. We try to block the flow, we redirect the winds of the Spirit, or we walk so far away from the life-giving Stream that we do not hear its sound, and we forget its power. We parch ourselves.

We are dry and thirsty, O God. Come, refresh us!

Come upon us, Holy Spirit!

Come upon us, Holy Spirit!

Come upon these waters.

Come upon these waters.

Let these waters be to us drops of your mercy.

Let these waters remind us of your righteousness and justice.

Let these waters renew in us the resurrection power of Jesus.

Let these waters make us long for your coming reign.

Most Holy God, Abba, Father!

Glory to you!

Jesus Christ, Savior, Lord!

Glory to you!

Spirit of fire, Spirit over the waters, Spirit of holiness!

Glory to you!

Eternal God, One in Three and Three in One!

All glory is yours, now and forever. Amen!

All who are baptized and have renewed their vows are invited to come to the font to use the water as a sign of refreshing. As each uses the water, another says to her or him:

Remember that you are baptized, and rejoice!

Our closing hymn today is #608 "This is the Spirit's Entry Now"

Please stand as you're comfortable in mind/body/spirit and let's sing together.

