

**The First Sunday after Epiphany:  
The Baptism of our Lord  
January 12, 2020**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus  
taught us the meaning of unconditional Love.  
Amen.**

If you ever want to have a preview of what the theme of a particular Sunday will be all about, just look at The Collect of the Day, which is found on the first page after the opening hymn, towards the bottom of the page. Today's Collect is all about The Baptism of Jesus and our own Baptisms. So, once that is recognized, it is no surprise that TODAY's sermon is going to be all about Baptism ...because this is the day designated in the church Calendar to focus on the Baptism of Jesus and the beginning of his public ministry.

I am delighted to have this Lectionary today, these scripture readings, that emphasize the significance of Baptism, because, for me, as a Priest, there is no more Holy moment for me than to say the words to the one who is being Baptized that "You are sealed as Christ's own forever!"

Having shared that, I can also tell you that if this seems a blatant pitch for anyone who has **not** been Baptized, to begin to think of it seriously, well ...you are right. I do so unapologetically...but... honestly...also, lovingly.//// And you know...this is St. Cyprian's! And absolutely EVERYONE is welcomed and included in everything that goes on here, including our Holy Communion, whether you are Baptized or not!

So...Now...You well may ask:

How did we get from Christmas to Jesus being baptized as a 30 year- old adult in such a very short time? In fact, when you think of it, we still had Jesus in the manger and the three wise men finding him last Monday, on Epiphany, the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas.

Well, the truth is... we do not have anything much in Holy Scripture about Jesus in between his birth and his being named, and now this account of his Baptism...except for the story of when he was perhaps about 12 and he stayed behind at the temple while his family journeyed on. But, this only adds to the emphasis on the event of his Baptism... and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove...for it is at that moment that Jesus begins his public ministry.

Like others, Jesus is immersed in the river...but, not at all like others, when he comes up out of the river, the Holy Spirit that he is later to impart to others, comes upon Jesus in visible form. The appearance is that of a dove. And the voice from heaven declares Jesus as the Son of God and that with him the Spirit of God will **remain**. ////////// Remember though,... when Jesus was leaving the Disciples, he said to them, " **My** Spirit I will give to **you**." During the very, very brief span of Jesus' earthly ministry, the total activity of God's Holy Spirit was through Jesus. Anointed with the Holy Spirit, Jesus made manifest God's Divine Compassion... in deeds of healing, and in setting free those who were victims of the many forms of the power of evil.

Jesus' Baptism is a life changing event for all of us, because we are then Baptized with the Baptism of Jesus Christ. WE are claimed by God through our faith in Jesus Christ. We KNOW to whom we belong. Our Baptism can remind us that no one determines our worth! We belong to God...and in Baptism he says to **us** "**You** are my Beloved!" Our true identity, as mysterious as it is, is in Jesus Christ, as we ourselves are sealed as Christ's own forever. As a reminder of this, later on in our service today, we will renew our Baptismal Covenant.

There is a wonderful story about Martin Luther. When he was tempted to doubt God, he would shout out ... "I AM BAPTIZED! I AM BAPTIZED! Claimed by God!" In times of trouble or temptation, he would stand before the mirror and repeat "I have been Baptized." It was a way to remind himself who he was and WHOSE he was, and therefore, what he was all about. Martin Luther knew and trusted that at our own Baptism, we receive the Holy Spirit just as Jesus did at His Baptism. /// Only, we don't seem to realize the heavenly power we have. To remind ourselves, as Martin Luther did, that we have been Baptized is to reaffirm our commitment, and to remember the direction for our lives. Through our Baptism, we begin a close personal relationship with God,... but it doesn't end there. Because of our Baptism, we are called to reach out to others, just as Jesus did. In our Baptism we are called beyond ourselves.

Martin Luther called Baptism "the daily garment which we as Christians are to wear all the time." That is ... the pattern of our Christian life comes from the continuous dynamics of our Baptism...being brought low/humbled/going down into the water, so to speak/ washed by what happens in our lives, but then...RAISED UP. Every day is a new experience of that cycle if we will but realize it. And to recognize our sin, our brokenness, our need for repentance, but then, HOPEFULLY TO REMEMBER that we are members of the Body of Christ, one in him who dwells in us. Therefore, we can feel revitalized and we can be restored. All of this, if we truly live it, allows us to bask in the reality of this Epiphany Season, the time after Christmas when we celebrate the light that Christ is, especially in our darkest hours...the reality of the Baptism of Jesus ...and ours...and the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us! Renewing our Baptismal Covenant helps us remember that we are part of the whole family of Christ. But Baptism is so significant for another reason, as well. It calls us to look beyond ourselves to the world God has made and loves. It is like a good marriage where each is committed to the other out of love, but we also accept responsibilities because of that love. Because we are Baptized, our lives are different. Just as when we love someone, our lives are different because our focus is different.

One of the most successful and personable people on television is Oprah Winfrey. Movies, Book clubs, her own Network. Huge business operations. She does it all. I think it is pretty interesting that, while other talk shows on television were tearing people apart and putting all their illnesses and problems out for public humiliation, Oprah helped put people and families back together again. In a Newsweek magazine interview she was asked, "How do you separate yourself from your work?" She answered, "I take a hot bath...my bath is my sanctuary. (And now, listen to this...) She said... It's the place where I can wash off all the stuff of the day."

Baptism is a huge symbol...it's the water of creation...we are born anew to life in the Spirit and all the bad "stuff" is washed off. That Original, or Primary, Sin of pride, the sin of selfishness and ego is symbolically washed off. Baptism is the death of the old self. The old passes away and a new creation is born. What a gift!!

Remember when two of the disciples of Jesus: James and John, came to him to ask for the places of honor in His heavenly Kingdom? Jesus answered them by asking, "Are you able to be Baptized with the Baptism I have been Baptized with?" Meaning that there is a calling in our Baptisms. We have been given special gifts by God...and we are called by God to use those gifts for the blessing of others. Our Baptism is not just something to hold for ourselves. It sends us out into God's world. We are commissioned as God's people, marked as Christ's own forever. We are sent to serve our Lord. Most often we are called to serve the Lord right where we are...with the people we know, in the places where we live and work. That's usually where we can make the most difference. But, we need to realize that we **each** have our own special gifts...gifts to be used in the service of our Lord who gave us the gifts in the first place. We don't all have the same gifts. So, that is all the more reason that we need to be mindful of our own gifts, what we **do** have to offer.

There is a wonderful story about one of the greatest baseball players ever to wear a Pittsburgh Pirates uniform, Roberto Clemente. He showed great promise, even in his rookie year. Once when he was playing in New York, a reporter interviewed him and began comparing him with Willie Mays, a much-recognized superstar. Any rookie would have been flattered with such a comparison and undoubtedly this young outfielder was too. But when the reporter finished speaking, the rookie said to him: "Nonetheless, I play like Roberto Clemente." He was true to himself and to his own special gifts.

God has given each one of us special gifts that set us apart from others. Like snowflakes, no two of us are alike. There is only one of you. Each one of us is different and each one of us has something special to share with others. And, think of it... if we do not, that gift of God is not in the hopper, so to speak...it is lacking in God's world. Not only has God gifted each one of us with something very special, and not only do we have a variety of gifts, but also, if these gifts are exercised with love and commitment, ALL of God's people are strengthened.

Too often we look upon the Christian life in terms of duty and obligation. How much better it is when we see our faith in Christ as a gift to be received with gratitude and expressed with joy. Then our attitude in approaching each day is one of anticipating what opportunities will open up for us to use the gifts God has given us. Just as Jesus became empowered for the ministry he was called to, may we realize that we too are empowered for our own ministry...to serve the Lord in whatever form that may take in our own lives.

OUR Baptism reminds us that WE belong to the Lord. Every time we cross ourselves or wear a cross, we proclaim that; We remind ourselves that we were sealed in Baptism as Christ's own FOREVER. God claims us. We are His. Jesus is the Lord of our lives. Thank you Lord!

And...in closing... I certainly hope that some, who have not been Baptized, may realize anew the significance of Baptism and speak to Fr. Ted or me about arranging for their own Baptism. Perhaps especially if they are adults!!

AMEN