

**Sermon for the First Sunday after the Epiphany:  
The Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ, January 12, 2020**  
By the Reverend Dr. James C. Pace, Assistant Priest  
*Year A: Isaiah 42:1–9; Psalm 89:20–29; Acts 10:34–38; Matthew 3:13–17*

This glorious season of Epiphany opens us up to new opportunities for God’s love. We look once again at places where the Spirit flowed, focusing on times when God’s approval of earthly events brought light to the world.

The word “Epiphany” itself means revelation or “manifestation.” After the weeks of Advent and then Christmas, the church celebrates Epiphany as the beginning of the public disclosure of Jesus’ true identity.

We are given opportunities to train our sights on the special events that occurred around the beginning of Jesus’ ministry including the visit of the Magi from the east, whose gifts to the Christ child mirrored the prophecy that the Gentiles would bring their treasures to God’s Kingdom. Their coming indicates that Jesus’ reign would not be confined to Israel but would spread to include the entire world.

The Second event is the Baptism of Jesus. We celebrate that event this morning. In accepting John's baptism, Jesus sees his true identity endorsed from heaven itself, and his public ministry then begins. We really don't know why it took Jesus around 30 years for this to happen or what happened during those years. When I reflect back on my life, I can see that it took me 30 years at least to finally get an idea of who I was and what I needed to do with those realizations. It sometimes takes an accumulation of courage to take that next step in one's life course. What Jesus was about to embark took enormous courage, more than I can conceive. So maybe that is why there was a period of years: maturity. Insight. Growth. Perseverance. Testing. And then, confidence.

The other things we will see in Epiphany include the first public miracle of changing water into wine at a wedding in Cana. The calling of the first disciples. The teaching of the Beatitudes and finally the Transfiguration on the holy Mount where Jesus' glory is revealed to his closest disciple, and he was seen as the One who was superior to both the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah), while fulfilling them both.

So now allow me to focus a bit on the Baptism of all baptisms. Jesus decided to come to John to be baptized. A decision was made and a direction had been chosen. The purification and initiation rite had to be accepted by Jesus to inaugurate his ministry. Matthew tells us that this decision to be baptized by John was at its core an act of obedience. The Jordan River was not only the place where water flowed, but also the Spirit.

Jesus went to John. It was an active decision and everything changed. When we reflect back on our own baptisms, even if we were babes in arms, we made a visible commitment to Christ. Sitting on the fence ended. The freedom of any stalled commitment was over. Our allegiance was made public. Solidarities with others who profess Jesus Christ is made manifest. Our baptism was our Epiphany—our showing forth of belief—in response to God’s showing forth in Christ. The resting of the holy dove on Jesus was further proof of the Father’s approval as was the voice that proclaimed him “My Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” “*My Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.*” Here was the sentinel moment: Jesus is awakened to a new view of himself and his calling and he will never go back.

When we are baptized in the body of Christ, several life changing things happen. We make a covenant. We promise to serve God and worship God, to resist evil, to proclaim good news in Christ, to seek Christ in all persons, and to strive for justice. That's a mouthful. But to be able to do all that, we receive the Holy Spirit which empowers us to be able to persevere in keeping those promises over a lifetime of activities.

We also get to claim as our own the very same words that Jesus hears from God in heaven. "You are my beloved son, in you I am well pleased." Incorporated into Christ's body, we hear for ourselves God say to us, "you are my beloved daughter, my beloved son, and in you am I well pleased." In a way that we would never be able otherwise, those words become true for us and in us.

If you were a baby like me when baptized, are we supposed to remember the day and the time and who was all around us? Hardly. To remember one's baptism doesn't mean remember the physical, embodied moment in which the water was poured or sprinkled or splashed over one's head. It means remember who your baptism says that you are.

Take just a moment to free your mind a bit. Take your minds off your cell phones and the snores around you and what you have to do for the rest of the day. Be here with me at this moment for just a few seconds longer and imagine with me . . . God, who made all things, who holds all things together by his mighty power, sits with you, looks directly into your eyes, and says: “I am so proud of you. I see you for all that you are, for all that you have, and for all that you’ve done, and for all that you ever will do. I’m so glad that you are my child. And I am so very proud of you.”

That’s amazing. I don’t know how you could ever get much passed that. No matter what happens with your relationships, your work, your accomplishments; no matter how many mistakes you make trudging through life, how much you’ve done that you’re proud of, how much you wish you could have changed at some moment, how many books you write, how many deals you close, how many things you have, how much influence you exert, when it is all said and done, I don’t know that you can improve too much on the very idea that there is a God and in baptism you get to know that God is proud of you.

God says in baptism. God repeats it every time we come to the altar. Every time we adore the presence in the Monstrance. God never changes God's mind. "You. You. You! You are my beloved. And in you, I am well pleased."

Do you remember what happens after Jesus is baptized? The Holy Spirit literally chunks Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Our vocation as baptized Christians is never easy either. As we seek to establish justice on earth and respect the dignity of every human being, we battle demons of hatred, racism, rumor, sexism, ignorance, oppression, all of which seem to be gathering more steam each and every day.

Right now. Jesus has been there before we have, with the wild beasts. And the angels were there too, ministering to him. And we won't be alone either, as we keep going out into the wilderness to fight for God's righteousness.

So let us remember our baptism today. And let us open our hearts, our minds, and our very souls, and hear these words one more time: "You are my

beloved; my beloved child, and in you, I am well pleased.”

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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