

Sunday January 9, 2022 Epiphany 1 "Is Baptism Important?"

Isaiah 43:1-7 Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

So what is new or expected in 2022? A recent newspaper article outlines the potential release dates for upcoming movies hoping to make it to the big screen cinemas sometime this year. But, what else is expected to occur in 2022? We know that February will bring the Super Bowl football game, maybe. The Beijing winter Olympics with no spectators will be broadcast worldwide. Some autonomous cars will go on sale in Europe. China will complete its first space station. Qatar will host the Fifa World Cup of soccer and Germany will phase out nuclear energy. But what is new and expected for you in 2022?

For many of us, we just hope to be able to cope for the next 3 weeks without undue stress and anxiety. Many establishments are shut down again due to government regulations for health concerns stemming from the omicron variant. But what else is new? People might respond to this that nothing is new because it seems we are living in a scenario like Bill Murray did in the movie "Groundhog day" as he woke up to realize he was living the same day over and over again. But what is different for us is that it is not the same day, but merely a similar scenario. We just need to adapt and move into it or just move on and find other tasks and interests.

Since our last time of worship when we remembered the Wise Men giving gifts to the child Jesus, our encounter with the Promised Messiah has fast forwarded about 29 years. John the Baptist, that is Elizabeth and Zechariah's son, has grown up and he has accepted his call of proclaiming 'a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins'. John's purpose was to "Prepare the way of the Lord" as expressed by the prophet Isaiah hundreds of years before. John is the 'voice in the wilderness crying out' to those who would listen, to prepare for the Lord and make straight the paths." He spoke to all who would listen of the need to repent for themselves. Those hearing John had to realize that they could not rely on their ancestors' for their faith or their future. The faith of Abraham was not theirs to claim, they needed to repent themselves. John explained what this meant as he taught—giving of a second coat to the one who has none; tax collectors were to only collect what was prescribed and no more. Soldiers even asked what they should do also. He taught them not to extort money by threats or false accusation and be satisfied with your wages. As John taught many thought that he was the Messiah promised by God. But John quickly responded that he only uses water for baptizing the people, but the messiah would baptise them with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John was baptizing many people at the Jordan River. Jesus went from Galilee to the place where he was and was baptized. John did not want to do this and as we read in the Matthew 3 version of this story, he said, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me? But Jesus calmed him down and answered, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus' point was that he needed to be baptized as others had been, in order that people would know who he is.

This was part of the experience and epiphany moments of those at the River coming to understand who Jesus is. Jesus went into the water with John. He went down under the water as John prayed and as he came up out of the water, the heavens opened up, a dove descended upon him representing the Holy Spirit. And those present heard a voice come from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased. " This was Jesus big introduction to the human world. God revealed to those watching and listening that this man before them was His Son.

Did Jesus need to be baptized? John the Baptizer questioned whether Jesus needed to be baptized. Jesus said that it was necessary in order to 'fulfil all righteousness'. God had promised to show John who the Messiah was by giving him a sign. So when Jesus was baptized, the descending dove showed John and revealed Jesus as His Son and the Messiah. This baptism also marked the beginning of the coming kingdom of heaven through Jesus. By being baptized Jesus begins His work as the messiah, by identifying with the human need and provided the means by which it can be accomplished. Baptism was a symbolic preparation for the coming King and kingdom. Jesus' baptism symbolized Christ's coming death and resurrection for our sins. Through the act of Jesus' baptism, we his followers as Christian believers see the institution that His future saints and all would believe would be identified. To be a follower of Christ means to identify oneself as being baptized- receiving the water of baptism and rising with a renewed heart and spirit focused on Christ. Why we baptize is because we want to be identified with Jesus and receive His Spirit upon us.

Jesus came out of the water and the voice from heaven spoke acknowledging him as His Beloved Son. When we are baptised we also receive an anointing of oil- in the shape of the cross of Jesus, we are marked as Christ's followers.

Baptism is one of two sacraments we celebrate in our United Church of Canada. It is a sacrament symbolizing many things= belonging, repentance and of knowing that we believe in Christ Jesus and what he has done for our sake—dying and rising to new life. It is a sacred holy

moment when water is placed on the forehead of an individual and I cannot truly articulate what occurs in that moment, the holiness of the moment is because God's Spirit descends upon the person. And from that moment on, this person- adult, child or infant belongs to Christ and to the holy church.

IS baptism necessary? There are different ways to answer this. Necessary like a physical need like water and food; but spiritually yes. Jesus was baptized in order to show others the need to show who he was. We are baptized by water and we are then identified as belong to the Christian church, and part of God's family. This is a holy and sacred moment for each individual whether adult, child or infant.

Years ago, I have received requests about 'getting their baby done" from young parents. The request was for something important for their child but to 'get done' is not the correct phrasing. For when we do baptize infants and small children, it is the parents who make the decisions for the children with the hope that they will fulfill the promise of raising their child in a Christian home and within the community of faith where this celebration of belonging takes place. However, this commitment to the church is not always lived out. But when it occurs we celebrate baptism as a joyful and loving time as God's family gets a little bigger, and there is a renewal of faith by the parents or adults as well as the whole community of faith.

As we begin 2022 there is a need for faith renewal because many people are uncertain or even fearful of what this pandemic may do to people of all ages. There is a need to recommit oneself to the wonder and joy of living of Christ Jesus without fear and relying on him to see us through. We are remembering Jesus' baptism today- and what the voice of heaven said about him. This is my Beloved Son. With you I am well pleased.

Let us think for a moment about our own baptisms- some of you will remember it, many will not but there might have been a time when you did profess your faith, when you looked to God for support and care and when you realized that your church family is there no matter what.

In these early days of 2022 it is appropriate to enter a covenant with God and renew our faith and trust in him. The covenant of faith that we share was first written in 1747 by John Wesley one of the key leaders of the Methodist movement who believed and trusted the Holy Spirit to speak to people. In the words we will share we ask God to lead and guide our lives and to state "you are mine and I am yours".

Jesus was baptized to be our example in faith. As we remember this, let us be reminded of his love for us all. Let us rejoice because he meets us at the font of water and at the table. Let us rejoice and give thanks for this is our faith lived out as brothers and sisters in Christ. We are called to be one with Christ and one with each other. So be it.

Let us pray:

Heavenly God creator of life and all that there is- hear us as we renew our covenant with you. Show us Jesus again and how he served you faithfully. Help us to learn and grow in our faith as we are reminded of God's love for us at all times. Bless us we pray as we covenant anew and as we pray and praise as the body of Christ in this place. Amen.