

SUNDAY, January 12, 2025 EPIPHANY2 “Jesus is Baptised and We are Renewed in Faith”

Isaiah 43:1-7 Luke 3:15-22

Time seems to fly by- I've heard this said many times especially as people are busy and as they get older. Here we are almost to the mid point of January and we finally get snow and it really feels like winter with the cold temperatures we have had. But it is true that in our story today yes time has flown by-- Jesus is no longer a toddler at his parents' feet but a young man who is on the brink of beginning to fulfill his life's work and mission. But who is Jesus? And what have we missed in these intervening years from being a toddler and receiving visitors from the East who brought special gifts to the time when we read in Luke's gospel of the man who was presenting himself to be baptised.

There is very little known of Jesus' growing up years except the time he is left behind when the family goes to the temple and is considered lost. But he understands that he was in the house of God and learning from those who would teach him even more. Yet he returns home and we are not aware of any other stories of his youth or early years. It is presumed he works with his father in the carpentry shop for a while for he would have learned this trade from him.

Yet as we turn the pages in the Gospel of Luke 3 we read about how the word of God came to John son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. John proclaimed to those who would listen, the baptism of repentance and what this meant to them in their everyday life. His teachings were attracting many people and some thought he was the promised Messiah. But he clarified that he was the one to prepare the way for the Messiah. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River (according to Mark 1) in order to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15). But what is amazing is what happened when Jesus rose up from the water. The heaven was opened up, the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the bodily form like a dove and a voice from heaven was heard. “You are my son, the Beloved with you I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:22) Hear the voice of God is speaking to Jesus directly which is the same in Mark. But it is the words recorded in Matthew 3:17 that differ because the voice of God states: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” In this version of the story, God the Father/Creator is introducing his son to all who witness his baptism and telling them Jesus is His Son.

The waters of baptism therefore hold a special beginning point in Jesus' life and this sacrament does this with many of us as well. Each time we feel the waters of baptism we are reminded that the sacred water from which Jesus emerged is symbolized in what we say and do

for the rest of our lives. IT is the public experience of what it means to be Christian and a believer in the one who lived died and rose again for our sakes.

Baptism for us today welcomes people into the family of God and it is an opportunity to share beliefs about the changes which may occur as a result of coming to believe and receive Christ. Baptism is often seen as the beginning act of becoming aware of who Jesus is in life but it is also one of few steps people are asked in order to commit themselves

John Wesley realized this many years ago when he began working with people who were looking deeper into themselves and searching for their role and place with Christ in faithful service. He wrote the Covenant in 1747 as a way of remembering and renewing their baptismal promises. He wrote this and offered it for all to share at the beginning of each New Year to enable people to understand what it means to serve Jesus. The prayer describes the life of a participant with Christ in his mission. It is a practical description of what Jesus was talking about when he said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Baptism marks the beginning of life in Christ and his ecclesia church, a people who "profess to pursue holiness of heart and life; universal love filling the heart and governing the life." The Covenant prayer helps us remember what this Jesus-way of life looks like and what loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind and loving our neighbor as ourselves requires of us.

When one looks out on a field of freshly fallen snow it is peaceful and calm- no footprints, no ski doo trails, ski trails or pen marks. This is also true of a new calendar with nothing written on it, no appointments, erasures, or coded dates for special celebrations. There is nothing that marks it up or makes a statement that needs to be changed or amended or noted for future reference. And this is why we share in the Covenant today.

These words remind us that this church is made up of many people with gifts; some yet to be discovered others needing a rest; some ideas ready to be offered with excitement and some needing to be let go. This is also reflective of individuals whose time to serve needs to be prayed upon as well as how one serves. For we know that many are called to serve, but few are willing to take on tasks God places upon them. And this Covenant enables us to reflect on this for ourselves as individuals.

For when we share in the sacrament of Communion; we are promising to ourselves and to others that we are not the focus of the church, but we will lift up and worship and praise Jesus

for he is the one who saves us and loves us. He is our saviour and Messiah. But we as a whole need to remember the words of God--

You are my son; This is my Son; whom I love. Listen to him. As we enter into this time of looking at who we are, what our mission is in 2025 and what our roles might be and become, we are in need of the Spirit's guidance and strength. We are in need of hope renewed and restored, for the sake of others and ours as we strive to grow in grace.

Let us remember this as we prepare to renew the Covenant; as we share in faith together and share in what Jesus asked us to do in remembrance of Him. Let us pray:

God of grace enable us to open our hearts to your Spirit. Move us we pray as we seek to be your faithful people. Enable us to serve or to step aside so that all may be blessed and renewed through the waters of baptism just as Jesus experienced. Bless us we pray as we prepare ourselves to live and renew our faith in you as we seek to thrive in 2025. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.