

Baptism of Jesus  
Luke 3:15-22  
January 12, 2025

“Beloved of God”  
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

*As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 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 the Holy Spirit and fire. 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.’*

*Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 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; with you I am well pleased.’*

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We’re back today with Baptism of Jesus Sunday. Miraculously, the toddler of last Sunday has matured into a full-grown adult. Today’s episode in the life of Jesus, finds him on the banks of the Jordan River with his slightly elder cousin, John. John was somewhat of an ascetic. Despite being the son of a priest, John shrugged off the life of privilege and learning that was his birthright and took up residence in the desert, wearing rough clothes of camel’s hair and subsisting on a balanced diet of wild honey and insects. He preached a message of repentance and baptism and, apparently, he attracted both large crowds and disciples of his own.

While the common folks were captivated by his message, John managed to get under the skin of religious authorities. I'm not sure whether it was his general coarseness and dismissal of the temple establishment, or the fact that he called them a "brood of vipers," but John made some powerful enemies. About six months after he emerged on the desert scene, John found himself at the sharp end of an executioner's blade for having offended the king.

For whatever reason, Jesus too was drawn to John. Some scholars even suggest that he was originally one of *John's* disciples. Our text from Luke shows Jesus following John into the waters of the Jordan River and submitting to baptism. It's what happens afterward that finally turns the spotlight from John to Jesus. Luke tells us that, "*the heaven was opened, 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; with you I am well pleased.'*"

I couldn't tell you what, but something about that experience marked a turning point for Jesus. The gospels report that he goes camping in the wilderness for 40 days and then launches his own public ministry. Something about his baptismal experience changed him, launched him, or set him free.

Did his baptism awaken Jesus' messianic consciousness – revealing his true identity as God's child? Did John's bold preaching and Jesus' dutiful submission to his baptism inspire him to become a preacher in his own right? Or, did the affirmation of his heavenly parent give him the freedom and courage to be and to do what he'd always wanted to? I honestly don't know. But what I do know is that the words Jesus heard that day are words that every child longs to hear from their parents. It's true, right? We've all longed for the affirmation of parents or caregivers at some point in our lives. Maybe we still do.

Back in 2018 when I graduated with my doctorate degree, my grandmother came up to me during the reception and said, "Your dad

would be so proud.” My father had passed unexpectedly in 2005 and it really meant the world to hear that from her.

“You are my child, my beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Whether we admit it or not, I think we all long to hear those words. It’s no accident that the lectionary pairs this particular text from Luke with a wonderful reading from the prophet Isaiah. Paraphrasing only slightly, the prophet speaks for God:

*You are my beloved, do not fear.  
I have called you by name, and you are mine.  
You are precious in my sight, and I love you.  
I am with you.<sup>1</sup>*

The prophet reminds us that the words Jesus heard at his baptism are meant, not just for him, but for us too. And there are days when we *need* to hear these words. There are days when we need to hear that we are loved. There are days when we need to know that no matter what we’re going through, we’re not alone. There are days we need to believe that when we celebrate a victory, God celebrates with us; when we struggle or fall, God’s will be the first tear that falls; when we struggle to carry our burdens or the going gets rough, God’s will be the hand that steadies us; and that when we can go no further, God’s will be the peace that passes all understanding. There are and there will be those days and when we have them, we need to be reminded that the words Jesus heard at his baptism are for us too. “You are my child, my beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Maybe hearing the words again makes those days just a little easier to bear.

In our baptismal liturgy here at New England Church we say that, “through baptism, Christians are reminded of their divine birthright as children of God and brought into union with each other and with the Church of every time and place.” That divine birthright as children of

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 43:1-5

God belongs to all, baptized or not, Christian or not, believer or not. Baptism allows us to hear it again; to claim it for ourselves or our loved ones. But we will *need* to hear it again, and again, and again. “You are my child, my beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Today, on this Baptism of Jesus Sunday, this first Sunday in the season of Epiphany, I want to invite you to do two things. First, if you are a parent or God-parent, grandparent or step-parent, aunt or uncle or close family friend, tell your child, no matter their age, that you love them and that you’re proud of them. They may really need to hear it. Second, and I know that we don’t really do *this sort of thing* here, but I invite you to dip your fingers into the baptismal font by the lobby doors and remind yourself that you are loved – by God and by this community. We never stop needing to hear it. “You are my child, my beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Amen.