

For the people of St. Philip's
The Baptism of Jesus
January 10, 2010
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22.
Maria Hoecker, preacher

This morning as we celebrate the baptism of Jesus we are also celebrating the baptisms of four souls in our midst... Palmer, Catherine, Lily, and Justin. In doing so we also remember our own baptisms - one of the most important sacraments of the Christian Church.

The act of baptism - an act that Jesus himself underwent - is depicted here in this window nearest the pulpit...see how the light shining in illuminates this story today....baptism reminds us of what God already knows: that we are children of God, beloved by our creator, and that we are part of a larger family of people...the people of God.

What has always struck me about baptism is not the promises we make (or that our parents make on our behalf) but the promises that you the congregation make with the ones about to be baptized. It's when I hear your chorus of voices repeating your own baptismal covenant, and responding with affirmation and promise to the questions asked by the presider at the baptism, than I get a sense of the living breathing Body of Christ. You. All of you. You are carrying new life in Christ forward from generation to generation today. It is momentous. This luminous event is bigger than any one of us and it takes all of us, together, to be present for each other.

I hope that what we always remember about baptism is that it is an act we share together and that the promises we make along with the newly baptized are as serious and as important as any vows, be it a marriage, a consecration, or an ordination.

Think about it: how many times have we all participated in a baptism, spoken the words of promise to nurture the newly baptized in their faith, and then rarely again speak to the newly baptized nor inquire about their well-being. How many of our newly baptized come for their baptism and then we don't see them much anymore?

What I hope today as we renew our vows that we also feel a renewed sense of determination to reach out to those around us with the love and concern we feel for family because the people gathered around today are One with us in Christ.

I have to say, there has always been a certain amount of controversy about the baptism of Jesus and what it meant.

[Barbara Brown Taylor](#), in her sermon *The River of Life*, has spoken on this.

The Christian church has never been comfortable with the baptism of Jesus. Compare the accounts of it in each of the four gospels and you cannot miss the un-ease of the authors. Matthew elaborates on Mark's story by adding that John tried to talk Jesus out of being baptized, and Luke will not even come out and say it was John who did it. The fourth gospel is the most ticklish of all. In it, John bears witness that he saw the Spirit descend like a dove upon Jesus, but he does not mention anything about a baptism at all. Scholars say all this embarrassment is our surest proof Jesus really was baptized by John, because when someone tells you something that it is not in his best interest for you to know, then you can be reasonably sure he is telling you the truth.

The controversy exists because if Jesus was baptized and his sins were forgiven in the act (in the way that John the Baptist understood baptism) it would mean that Jesus, the divine and perfect one, might have had sins to be forgiven and it appears that this notion of Jesus, the one who was also human, was too much for some of the authors of the Gospels to bear. So by the time we get to our account of Jesus baptism here in Luke it is unclear who baptized Jesus. Was it John? Did Jesus baptize himself? Luke doesn't tell us. But I suspect as well that John the Baptist was the one who baptized Jesus and that Jesus took his place among the other sinners who gathered around John.

Again, Barbara Brown Taylor says:

Even if (Jesus) were innocent, even if his intentions were nothing but good, it was ruinous to his reputation. Who was going to believe that he was there just because he cared about those people and refused to

separate himself from them? Gossip being what it was, who was not going to think that he had just a few teeny-weeny things to get off his conscience before he went into public ministry?

Our baptism is a gift. *“The glory of God is the human being fully alive...”*

— Irenaeus, 2nd century

The Good News is simple: the point of baptism is life, life upon life. When you were baptized, you stepped into Jesus’ baptism and into Jesus’ life. Mark’s Gospel tightly connects baptism and the life of Jesus. Unlike the Mathew and Luke, Mark starts his story with Jesus’ baptism. There is no birth account—no Christmas story like we have in Luke. At the beginning of Mark, there is baptism. Baptism is the beginning of the story of Jesus. Baptism is the context of the life of Jesus—the rest of his days on earth are the working out of his baptism.

This is the story of our baptisms as well. It happens at a specific time and place. But it also marks the beginning of a life of baptism. After baptism, our entire life becomes the overflow of those baptismal waters, which is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is how we link our lives to the life of Jesus. We bind our lives to his. And we commit to a way of life that gives life—that shines new life, that multiplies life, like Jesus did, from generation to generation.

Martin Luther ~ *All of life is baptism*. We are always being submerged in darkness and chaos, the stuff of life that causes despair, but we are always reborn into new life through it all. All of life is baptism. It means that every painful moment that seems like a little death in our lives is also the moment of the outpouring of new life, the overflow of Jesus’ baptismal waters, the movement of the Holy Spirit. *All of life is baptism* means that God is always creating new possibilities out of the stuff that seems like a dead end. That is the way of our baptism. We are always on the verge of new life, no matter how dark our lives may feel.

All of life is baptism. God is always hatching new life from the depths of darkness—“Let there be light,” God has said from the very beginning. That’s what it means to believe in the baptism of Jesus. Not just believe

in it, but to do it: to be baptized, to join our life to the life of Jesus. To choose life all along the way so that we all, together, can be “human beings, fully alive.” As we live and breathe we will proclaim God’s glory and beauty and saving grace to a world yearning for Light.

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A thought for Epiphany: "My life has become one of interconnectedness, the small epiphanies of each moment well lived. I don't trust the big ones where my ego gets all puffed up. It's either here and now or we've missed it." -A Dominican Sister