

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Baptism of Jesus

Scripture: Mark 1:4-11 NRSV

⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The first Sunday of Epiphany celebrates the baptism of Jesus. The baptism of Jesus we read in scripture reading describes the true image of Epiphany. Mark 1:10-11 says that "And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.""

This is what happened when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan. This includes three marks. Firstly, the heavens were opened; and secondly, the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him, and lastly, a voice from heaven said that "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17)

Before Jesus started his ministry, he visited John the Baptist proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (4) According to the commentary, John the Baptist was Jesus' relative. Although John the Baptist had baptized a lot of people, he hesitated to baptize Jesus because he thought the position was changed. He believed that "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (7-8) In Matthew 3:14, he said when Jesus came to him to be baptized, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" (14) However, Jesus convinced John that it was reasonable to

be baptized by the cleanliness of the sinner. Jesus, the innocent, went down to the low places of sinners and tried to be baptized by sinners.

It was the way of God's righteousness that the innocent Lord was baptized by sinners. Jesus didn't mind the process of God's righteousness, whether it was baptized in place of sinners, whether it was tested by demons in the desert, or even be crucified. Then, John consented. (Matt 3:15)

When Jesus was baptized by John, firstly, the heavens were opened; and secondly, the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him, and lastly, a voice from heaven said. (10-11)

Let's focus on the meaning that the heavens were opened first. For a long time, the heaven and the earth were separated. The relationship between God and humanity had been cut off because of their sins. According to Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned" This is the original sin.

When Jesus was baptized, the opening of heaven revealed that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior. Through that, those who believe in Jesus no longer live apart from God. The light of salvation was opened to those who confess Jesus as Christ. As a result, we as sinners also lived in fellowship with God. It was possible to confess that God is with us. Romans 6:11 says that "so you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Baptism is a holy ceremony to celebrate the new birth by the Spirit of God by confessing their sins and believing in Jesus as Christ. Thus, Christians have two birthdays for the body and the soul.

Everybody should experience the event of the opening of heaven in their lives. Everyone has darkness; everyone has a sense of guilt, everyone has confusion; everyone has anxiety. And everyone has endless emptiness. Jesus Christ is our savior who opened heaven from the chaos of life. Through him, we can feel light from the darkness. I hope the opening of heaven will be in your minds and your life and your future.

Now, let's focus on the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. (10) The dove is described as symbols of the Holy Spirit. It is an honorable bird that is used everywhere in the world as a symbol of peace. The dove means that the Holy Spirit was not a virtual entity or an unrealistic mystery, but God with us in a very concrete way. In the Old Testament and the New Testament, a word of a dove appears 58 times. In the Bible, the dove looks like the character of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, lived in the Spirit's guidebook all his life. And the Holy Spirit to come again is the promise of Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit is with us now. The Holy Spirit is God in us. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Rom 15:13) May the Holy Spirit accompany you in your life.

Finally, let's focus on a voice from heaven. (11) Christianity is the religion of sound. The sound is the voice of heaven, the cry of the times, the calm in the storm, and the silence in the universe. When Jesus was baptized, there was a voice from heaven. The sound was the voice of the prophets early on, and a cry for the hope of the people. It was the news of God in silence for a long time.

"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (11) We can listen to the voice of heaven about the word of my beloved son from Psalm and Isaiah. "My beloved son" is a word from Psalm 2:7, a blessing and a declaration of the king's accession to the throne. The voice of heaven proclaimed that Jesus had come to rule the world as a king. According to Isaiah 42:1, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights" Like this, the voice of the heaven proclaimed that Jesus had come to serve as a servant of the world. Christ, we confess, came to us as a king and a servant. This is the key point of Epiphany.

The servant who was described in Isaiah is a Messiah will come. Messiah is the future that everyone dreamed of. When Jesus was baptized, by the way, there was a voice from heaven: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." The voice indicated Jesus is the Messiah prophet Isaiah mentioned. This means Isaiah's prophecy had been fulfilled. As Isaiah predicted, the Messiah will bring forth justice to the nations. However, his way for justice is peace, not violence because he does not break a bruised reed and does not quench a dimly burning wick. (Isa 42:3) He gives hope to everyone in the world. Let us all accept his rule by faith.

God loves me. God loves you. God loves us. God rejoices in us. God calls us as my beloved son and daughter. God calls us his children. "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (17) This is the heart of God for us. When we embrace this with faith, we can enjoy true Epiphany. May you feel and enjoy the love of God as his children. Amen.