

The Baptism of Our Lord 9 January 2022

Isaiah 43:1-7 / Psalm 29 / Acts 8:14-17 / Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Today we celebrate the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the baptism of Leo Anthony, and for that matter, our own baptisms since our life as Christians begins with baptism.

One of my favorite stories about Pope Francis is that during an interview he was asked what the most significant event of his life has been, and he answered, “My baptism.” The reporter tried to clarify the question: No, I mean your life as Pope, the head of the entire Roman Catholic Church.” Pope Francis repeated, “My baptism.” Can’t get much clearer than that.

Water and fire are often significant in Scripture, as we heard in our first reading from Second Isaiah with its images of both while proclaiming the love of God who has called us by name. And today’s psalm brings us a picture of God riding a stormfront across the sea. This is a powerful God, whose voice shakes the wilderness.

God’s voice comes to us again in the Gospel, as Saint Luke tells us about Jesus’ baptism.

Other people are there, and John the Baptist is there; the baptism itself isn’t described, did you notice? Afterwards Jesus prays, the heavens open, the Holy Spirit appears in a form like a dove, and a voice names Jesus as “my Son, the Beloved.”

Luke doesn't tell us what the voice sounds like, so it's left to our imagination. Was it a whisper, or a thundering, creative voice like we heard described in the Hebrew Scriptures? It's up to each of us to know in our hearts how that voice speaks to us.

The people who were there with John and Jesus are described as being both filled with expectation, and wondering in their hearts, might John be the Messiah?

It seems that lots of us at times are hoping for a Messiah, somebody to save us. It might be someone on the world or national stage - a politician or political candidate to make right what we feel is wrong with our particular country. Or maybe it's a sports hero or team that makes us feel like we're part of something bigger, something special.

Perhaps the longed-for messiah is closer to home: that certain someone who may be a new romantic relationship so we'll never feel lonely again. Or maybe we'll be saved by the people we work with who tell us how indispensable we are. Or by our children, as they grow up and fulfill their dreams (and ours).

We can be like those people Luke describes, wondering if this person or that one might be the messiah. And even when they disappoint us – and eventually they always do – we may still keep looking for our personal messiah.

Do we imagine that Jesus is *that* Messiah?

I realize if we're worshipping here in church or online, of course we think Jesus is the Messiah, right? But do we expect Jesus to save us, not with a free get-out-of-hell card, but to save us right here and now, to make a difference in our daily lives?

Let's look at the evidence: Jesus comes to earth so that God can be closer to us. At the baptism, the heavens open and God speaks directly to Jesus. God moves from heaven to have an encounter with Jesus – and through Jesus, with all of us – right here on our own turf. God comes and meets us where we are.

God comes and meets Leo Anthony and each of us where we are: “You are my child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” The baptismal promise of being God's beloved child orients us and becomes more important to us as we put it to use in our lives.

In Holy Baptism God opens the heavens to meet us where we are, just as we are.

Jesus comes into our world, living as one of us, identifying with us, and bringing the presence of God into our world. Jesus dies for our sins and defeats death through his resurrection. And if we believe that, two things come out of it.

One, we don't have to look for messiahs around us. We can still support our favorite politicians or sports team, still hope for a good relationship, for a collegial workplace, knowing we will not be saved by those things. In fact, we're going to be disappointed in

people, and we in turn are going to disappoint them. They won't save us but that's okay, because God in Jesus has done just that.

When we receive the promise of baptism, we realize we don't need another messiah. And that frees us up to make a difference in the world and in the lives of those around us.

The blessing of baptism comes with a responsibility and an invitation: to see those around us as *also* beloved of God, and to treat them accordingly. Truth be told, we may not always want to see others that way. They may be different from us in ways that may describe us but don't define us - ways like gender, sexuality, race, occupation, life experiences. And baptism invites us to realize what a large and interesting family we're part of as God's children!

As our nation and world have become more polarized, regional or ideological commitments may be defining us to the point where we see someone who differs from us as threatening. As Americans, the question is, can we differ with people on important issues and still see them as Americans? For Christians the calling is even greater: Can we see someone who differs from us on important issues as a child of God?

That can be a challenge. But regardless of whether we get confused about our identity, or how many times we fall short of how God desires us to see and treat each other, *still* we are God's beloved children. And that gives us the grace and strength to try again. And again.

Perhaps next time, instead of waiting for that special person to come to us, we may go out and befriend others who are lonely or less fortunate. Next time we may learn to value our colleagues, our children, and neighbors for who they are, not for what they can do for us.

God has chosen us to do wonderful things in the world. Just as Leo Anthony hears that voice this morning at the font, we hear God's voice calling us by name. God saying "You are mine, I name you and claim you and seal you forever" has both the reassurance of a lullaby and the strength of a thundering creative force.

Because Jesus came as the Son of God we don't need any other messiahs, and because Jesus came as one of us, we are caught up in the power of the creating and redeeming God. When God's voice rings out, heaven opens and the purpose of life descends: we are called and equipped to make a difference in the corner of the world where we live. And thus all creation is changed.

Amen.