Baptism of our Lord.

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Sermon by the Rev. Bernadette Hartsough

Today we remember Jesus’s baptism. To understand today’s passage, we need to remember that there are three types of baptisms being referenced: baptisms by John the Baptist, Jesus’s baptism, and our baptisms. Our baptisms contain symbols from each of these baptisms. You could say that our baptisms are a combination of each type.

John the Baptist baptized with water after people repented. His role was to prepare people for the coming of Jesus. The water symbolized cleansing from sin. It represented a type of purification similar to Jewish rituals. A washing, purifying ritual in a dry desert region symbolized life in ways that we cannot imagine. We live with clean, fresh water everywhere but it’s not like that in other parts of the world. Our baptisms require water like John’s baptisms.

Then we have Jesus’s baptism. Jesus’s baptism reveals his identity. After the reference to Jesus’s baptism in today’s gospel, there is a genealogy of Jesus. It is not like Matthew’s genealogy that established Jesus as Jewish and a descendent from King David. Luke’s genealogy of Jesus goes backwards to Adam. It establishes Jesus as the son of Adam. This genealogy highlights that Jesus was with God during creation. He was with Israel and is with all of humanity. He enters human history to declare the arrival of God’s reign in human history and to redeem humanity. Jesus calls together a new community on earth called the church to continue his work.

Jesus's baptism includes the symbolic opening of the heavens. This symbolizes God’s blessing or God’s favor. Jesus’s baptism revealed his identity for everyone to see. His baptism is also a baptism of repentance. Jesus is repenting for all of us. He takes the place for all our sins. His baptism is a precursor to his sacrificial death. Our baptisms wash us from sin because of his baptism and his death. When we are baptized, we then share in Jesus’s redemptive activity. We are redeemed-forgiven, and we help others be redeemed through baptism.

After his baptism, Jesus is able to start his ministry. His identity and purpose are revealed. Our baptisms give us our identity too as followers of Jesus.

So, we are baptized with water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The water goes over our heads symbolizing going under the water from death to new life. We share in Jesus’s sacrifice, so we are cleansed and forgiven of our sins. Then we are sealed with oil marked as Christ’s own forever. Baptism is our new covenant with God. It replaces having the right genealogy. It is a new life cleansed of sin, a new identity with power from Holy Spirit.

Our church and prayer book are built around the sacrament of baptism. We are reminded of our baptism through the font at the entrance to the church and through the holy water at the doors. We bless ourselves with water to remember who we are. We renew our Baptismal Covenant at baptisms, and if we do not have baptisms, then at least four times a year on The Easter Vigil, Pentecost, All Saints, and today The Baptism of our Lord.

Our Baptismal Covenant reminds us of our identity. It reminds us of how to live and it reminds us of the grace and power of the Holy Spirit given to us. Sometimes we forget that being a Christian is not just about the work we are asked to do. It’s also about the power given to us to do it. John the Baptist describes our baptisms by Jesus as powerful. They are to be life changing full of fire and the Holy Spirit. When we stray, we can also come back to the font. We can always ask for forgiveness. We can always lean on the Holy Spirit.

Like Jesus, baptism gives us our identity and purpose. In Baptism and Confirmation, we submit to God’s grace. Through God’s grace we find our affirmation of who we are. We do not baptize ourselves. We are baptized by other people in the community of the church. The church responds to our baptism by blessings, prayers, and support.

I was baptized at 30 days old in a Polish Roman Catholic Church. My godmother Ana held me at the font. Ana was Austrian Polish. She had been in Auschwitz during World War II. She survived but had a hard life. She was around when I was very young but then because we were all separated, I did not see her again until I was 12. I knew her stories through family members. I saw her only once at age 12. I was surprised by the love she felt for me. Even though she wasn’t around physically, she prayed for me. She knew that her role as godmother didn’t end when she couldn’t see me. Baptism unites us in the family of God forever. Today I will baptize Juan, Joanna, and Lylah. We will pray for them and welcome them into the family of God.