

## Baptism of the Lord Sunday

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Today is Baptism of the Lord Sunday. A day in which we remember the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River at the hands of his cousin, John the Baptist. When we think of Baptism we think of sin. We think of the cleansing waters that bring forgiveness and renewal...a fresh start of dedicating our lives to Jesus. If that is all Baptism is about, however, why would Jesus – the sinless one – need to be Baptized? As United Methodists, we believe there is more to be found in the meaning of Baptism. Repentance? Yes...but even more.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of Luke's Gospel we find the story of Jesus' Baptism...I'll read verses 15-17 and 21-22

***3:15As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah,***

***3:16John 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 strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.***

***3:17His 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."***

***3:21Now when all the people were baptized and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened,***

***3:22and 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."***

My family was blessed this year that my husband Tim was able to come home for Christmas from his deployment overseas, where he serves as a Navy Chaplain. We were determined to cherish every minute of his time home and of the Christmas holiday itself. We did a good job of it. So good, as a matter of fact, that a week later Tim looked at us and said, "Did anyone take any pictures during Christmas? If so, could you share them with me." We all sat silent. Slowly we began to look at one another in disbelief. No one had taken any pictures. Normally I'm the big picture taker but it had occurred to me this year that I'm always watching life from the backside of a camera lens, or in my case, my phone screen. I had decided I would not do that this year. That I would try to be fully in the moment as these special moments unfolded. Apparently, we all felt the same way.

Then, Epiphany came and at our church we have a tradition of choosing a "Star" Word that will be our guide word in drawing us closer to Jesus throughout the year. My word for 2025 is "Relationships." At first I was disappointed, what am I going to do with a word like "relationships?" But then, I thought of the pictures. I thought of all the ways I get so easily distracted or sometimes so hyper focused on one thing that I don't notice life going on around me.

Since getting that word I've been trying to stay focused on the relationship that is right in front of me at the moment. But in doing so I've noticed a few other things. Like taking the kids to a museum and I noticed that as the kids played, parents sat on benches looking at their phones, offering no interaction with the kids. I stated to notice all the times I myself reached for my phone and tried to focus instead on just being in the moment. I'm a work in progress for sure.

When I read Luke brief account of the Baptism of Jesus, I was struck, first by his lack of detail – as if no one took a picture of the moment and their memory is fuzzy. But second, it was the final two verses that really stood out...***Now when all the people were baptized and when Jesus also had been baptized...***

Baptism is a community event. We don't normally Baptize people privately because Baptism is also about relationships. It is about relationships with the people of faith around you...and your relationship with God. Everyone was being Baptized, everyone there was showing that they were ready to turn their life over to God – a public declaration! For some, it was by repenting from sin and living a different life...for others it was about dedicating the life they were living to God...as I suspect was the case with Jesus. Jesus joined his friends and neighbors in showing where his commitment would be. This was the launch of his ministry...a show of devotion among the people, for the people, under the guidance of God's will. When he came out of the water and was praying – talking to God - 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."

Jesus' relationship with God is also revealed in his Baptism...son...beloved. I think this is a truth for all of us to consider...that Baptism is as much about our dedication to relationships as it is about our cleansing. To be dedicated to God is to hold with God's will, God's guidance, God's teaching. To hear God say in fresh ways that we are to love our enemies...and then go do it. To hear God say, love your neighbor...and then go do it. To hear God say, enact justice, practice mercy, and love kindness...and then go do it. It is about becoming aware of all the ways we look at our life of faith from a distance, and instead, choosing to pull it close and live in the moment with God and with the people around us.

Maybe today you can find you some water...run your hands through it...touch it to your forehead and remember your Baptism...remember that you are beloved sons...beloved daughters...a beloved child of a holy God who calls you into relationship, not just with God's self but with others who we find in our path.

Maybe that is what Baptism does, it makes us more intentional about how we see life and how we live it, and that's worth a 1000 pictures, don't you think?