

I wonder how many of us understand why Jesus' baptism matters? Or if our baptism matters? It seems we have a lot of other things to worry about: the economy, a divided government, a polarized culture, wars and rumors of wars – and that's just on the global front. At home, we may be preoccupied by concerns about our kids, or our jobs, or losing a loved one, or a parent struggling with memory issues, a sibling struggling with addiction, and more. There are probably a lot of things that feel more pressing than Jesus' baptism right now. So what are we to do?

When you listen to Mark's terse account, what is most striking to me is that Jesus doesn't do or say much of anything. Mark says, *"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 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.'"*

Jesus seems passive in this scene. And, maybe that's just the way it should be. After all, this is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. This is the start of his long journey toward Jerusalem and the cross. And so at his baptism, Jesus doesn't have to *do* anything, he simply *receives* the gift of the Holy Spirit and God's favor. We cannot under estimate this powerful word of acceptance, identity, blessing, and commitment: *"You are my beloved Son. With you I am well pleased."* How might Jesus have longed to hear such words? How much strength might he have drawn from them at various points in his ministry? Jesus knows who he is and *whose* he is – to hear that he is accepted, loved, pleasing. I suspect these were powerful words that shaped his entire ministry.

And here is the connection to our own baptism and a reminder of why that event – which most of us do not remember and perhaps haven't given it a second thought – matters so much. Each of us longs to hear words of acceptance, identity, blessing, and commitment and this is precisely the gift of Baptism. We do not have to do anything to receive God's promises. The beauty of infant Baptism is that you *can't* do anything. We are passive recipients of God's blessing and favor. We are called God's beloved children not because of something we do but because of who God is – a loving parent who wants nothing more than to see us flourish.

In Holy Baptism: God chooses us. In Holy Baptism, God says that we are enough. Already. That we are pleasing to God and deserve to be loved. And that identity of being God's beloved child – precisely because it is established by God – cannot be taken away from us or, for that matter, lost by us. BCP "indelible", branded. And God continues to come into our lives to call us beloved and blessed and promise once again to be with us and for us—always. That promise and blessing, in turn, helps us face all the challenges we mentioned earlier. Problems at home or in the community, concerns about the world or our personal lives. We can face whatever that might be with greater confidence knowing that God is with us.

Think, for a moment, of all that will happen in the coming year – the decisions that will be made, relationships started (or ended), career changes, schools entered, illnesses endured, challenges surmounted, risks taken, adventures dared, love shared. So much will come down the pike in the coming weeks and months. Some of it we may anticipate and be prepared for, but much of it we simply can't imagine. Daunting. Until we remember that God is with us through all of it. God is

on our side. God will not abandon us but will walk alongside us, strengthening us, encouraging us, granting us grace sufficient to become the people God wants us to be.

*“You are my beloved child. With you I am well pleased.”* Powerful words. Words that will shape and strengthen us throughout this new year.

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The First Sunday After the Epiphany: The Baptism of our Lord  
7 January 2024  
St. Thomas' Church, Camden, Maine