

Sermon

Epiphany 1C January 12, 2025

Baptism of Our Lord

*I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. – Is. 43:1-2*

On the First Sunday after the Epiphany, we commemorate the baptism of Jesus. This is also one of the days “especially appropriate for baptisms,” and is one of the days we renew our own baptismal vows. We renew our vows because it is too easy for us to get caught up in life. It is too easy for us to forget the promises and vows we have made.

Even though we do this four times a year, we may still ask ourselves, “What is the point of baptism?”

At our baptism we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own for ever. But don’t we, by our very nature of being created in God’s image, already belong to Christ for ever? So if we already belong to God, why the need for baptism?

First off, we need to understand that baptism does not generate more godly love. There is nothing we can do to earn more of God’s love. As we love our children unconditionally, so, too, does God love us unconditionally. Our baptism does not cause God to love us more. An unbaptized child is loved just as much as a baptized child.

What baptism does do, though, is that it grafts a person into the Body of Christ. Baptism is the adoption process by which a person becomes part of the household of God. This is the point of baptism – to fully include a person in this household we call the Church.

As a biological or adopted family in the best of circumstances loves, teaches, raises, disciplines, supports, and shapes children to become capable adults, the Church does the same thing. The Church, in its best form, loves, teaches, raises, disciplines, supports, and shapes us to be faithful followers of Christ. Baptism places us in a new relationship and we learn to see things as Christ saw them. At our baptism we make specific vows which we promise to uphold to the best of our ability – to be

faithful in worship, to resist evil, to proclaim the good news, to love our neighbors, and to work for justice and respect.

I was in a bar last week having a small conversation about God and church with another patron. This person basically said, “No offense, but I don’t think I need to sit in church to be with God. I can be with God when I’m up in the mountains.” I didn’t disagree. You can find God in any number of non-church settings.

But what the Church gives you that your solitary mountain experience doesn’t is a community. Being part of a church community, in the best circumstances, is being in a place of love and support. It’s a place to learn and grow. It’s a place to be challenged and comforted. Jesus didn’t do his ministry alone, and he didn’t send out the apostles alone.

Community is an important aspect of our faith, and baptism brings us into that community.

Here’s something else about that community: this community of believers isn’t limited to the here and now. When we are baptized into the household of God, we are joined with believers through all time and space – those who came before and those who are yet to come. Through our baptism we are joined with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven.

Ultimately our baptism joins us to God with God’s reconciling mission. Rather than being simple believers who know God as a loving creator, our baptism charges us with being active partners with God in the faith. We should be faithful in worship. We should work for the spread of the good news through our time, talent, and treasure. We should work for justice, speaking for the voiceless and caring for those in need.

Can a person do all this without being baptized? Of course. But baptism makes, or should make, this a priority in our lives.

Baptism is not an end goal or a transaction whereby we pay a fee (baptism) to get to heaven. Baptism is only the first step of our faith. It is the foundation on which all we do as disciples rest. And every so often we need to be reminded of what we are called to do and who we are called to be.

Through Christ, we have been redeemed. God has called us by name. When we pass through the waters of baptism, we are assured and sealed that God will be with us always. So with that knowledge, let us renew our own baptismal vows.

Amen.