
My Sermon from Sunday January 10, 2021 'The Baptism Of The Lord' ~

"The Gift Of Baptism"

*Through the written word and through the spoken word may we know
your Living Word,
our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.*

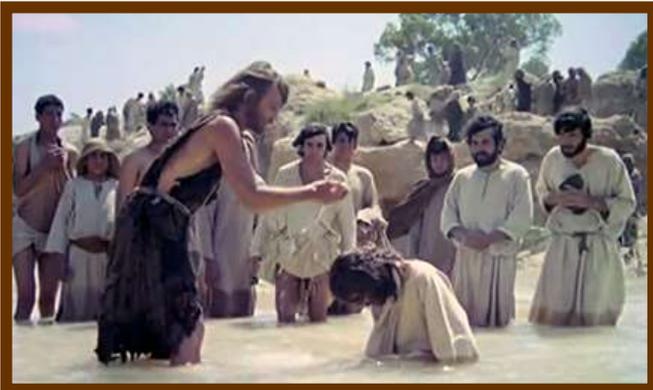
We are in the Christian season of **Epiphany**, known as "**Epiphanytide**," which goes from January 6 until the beginning of **Lent** on 'Ash Wednesday,' February 17, 2021.



During this season, we pray to be illumined by the radiance of God's glory and to shine. We pray to make known our Saviour Jesus and to worship him and obey him.

This Sunday is known as "**The Baptism of the Lord.**" And I need to share a baptismal story with you.

Two Canadian men were travelling around Finland. They decide to go to a Finnish Lutheran church on Sunday morning. (This was before COVID-19.) They also decide to do exactly what the person in front of them is doing. The plan works well for most of the service. The men stand, and sit, and bow their heads by imitating the man in front of them. At the end of the service, the man stands up and so do the Canadian men. Everyone starts to laugh and the travelers have no idea why. They talk with the pastor on their way out of the church and they ask him why everyone laughed when they stood up. The pastor said that he was going to be doing a baptism for a month old baby and he asked the father to please stand!



Today, as we celebrate the **Baptism of Jesus** by **John the Baptist** in the river Jordan, we reflect upon the significance of our own baptisms. If you are not baptized, I encourage you to consider baptism and to be marked as belonging to Christ forever. We will soon renew our baptismal vows. *(Dear faithful reader: I will include the renewal of baptismal vows at the end of the sermon. Please renew your vows and say the responses out loud.)*

It is a massive jump of 3 decades in the narrative of Jesus. Just last Sunday, we celebrated the visit of the wise men to the Christ child and today we have jumped ahead 30 years to Jesus' baptism, and the beginning of his 3 years of ministry.

Jesus' baptism is such a significant event in the life of his ministry that all 4 gospels include the story. Only 1 gospel, that of Luke, includes the nativity story, and only Matthew includes the visit of the wise men, but all 4 gospels include the baptism.

We read that Jesus came from Nazareth in a section of northern Israel known as Galilee. This area is still known as Galilee. It is very pretty with rolling hills and the Sea of Galilee.

For centuries, we downplayed the significance of our baptisms, what we also refer to as our "Christenings." Why? We lived in a Christendom world and everyone was baptized. In fact, we fussed more over denominational loyalty than we ever did about whether or not we were Christians.

When we are baptized, we are baptized as Christians, not as Anglicans, or Roman Catholics or Presbyterians or Lutherans. Our baptisms tie all Christians together all around the world. We are only baptized once. We can renew our baptismal vows, which we will do today. Some people say ~ *'Well, I was baptized as an infant so I need to be baptized when I can make my own faith testimony.'*

Your parents and godparents made the promises on your behalf out of love and care for you. We do not deny our children car seats and healthy food so why would we deny them the grace of the baptismal sacrament? We don't wait until our children are old enough to ask them if they wish to be given warm clothing and nutritious food. We know what is good for them. Baptism provides grace which is a gift beyond all understanding. We are following the early church and the Bible tells us that entire households, which would include children and infants, are baptized together. Should we renew our baptismal vows when we are old enough to understand? Absolutely yes! We do this through confirmation and through times when we intentionally renew our vows, like this morning. Some people at St. Paul's have made their 'faith testimonies' and read them out during a worship service. Some of these testimonies are even available for you to read on our website.

Baptism is a beautiful connection that marks us as belonging to Christ forever. It can be done through sprinkling or even full immersion in water. It does not hurt and is an exhilarating spiritual experience. There is a true story of **St. Patrick** baptizing **King Aengus** in Ireland in the mid 5th century AD. St. Patrick's crozier had an iron spike on the end of it which he used to stand the crozier in the ground beside him while he was praying and preaching. At the King's outdoor baptism, St. Patrick at one point is praying with his eyes closed. He lifts up the crozier and brings it down hard, not into the earth but into the foot of King Aengus! This brave man never cries out or says a word. After the baptism, St. Patrick looks down and sees all the blood. St. Patrick realizes what he has done and begs the King for forgiveness. He asks the King why he never said anything. The newly-baptized King replies that he thought it was part of the baptismal rite. Baptism is not supposed to hurt!



An early geometric shape for baptism is an octagon, a shape with 8 equal sides. Since the early days of the church, Christians have used this shape for churches and for baptismal fonts. There remain the ruins of a 5th century church in the town of Capernaum which is where Jesus had his ministry base. Jesus lived with Peter and his brother Andrew and their families in this fishing village by the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus did not set up his base in Nazareth, where he was raised, but in a town where some of his disciples lived. James and John also lived in Capernaum.

Christians started worshipping in Peter's home in Capernaum as early as 50 CE, just 20 years after the crucifixion. A large room had been plastered and remains of oil lamps and graffiti on the walls have been uncovered. Phrases such as *"Christ have mercy."* The 5th century church was built on top of the ruins of the reconfigured home of Peter, pictured above.

You will see that it is in the shape of an octagon. Why 8 sides? Baptismal fonts have 8 sides as does the font at St. Paul's. We know from the Bible that there are 7 days of creation (6 days of creation and then the Sabbath) and that 7 is a perfect number in the Bible. Of course, we know that the creation days are allegorical and can represent billions of years. Our Old Testament reading for this morning is from the first chapter in the Book of Genesis. God is the creator.



Then why don't fonts have 7 sides? The 8th side represents the **Resurrection of Christ**. He rose from the dead on Sunday, what we call the 8th day. God's new creation, God's re-creation, began in the resurrection of Christ. The 8th day is the first day of the new creation.

Through our baptisms, you and I share in the gift of God's new creation. We are a risen people, a holy people, a new people.

Here is what St. Paul wrote to Christians in Corinth:

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation."

2 Corinthians 5: 17

When we are baptized, God places *"a song in our heart"* (quotes by Stanley Hauerwas from his book, *The Character of Virtue ~ Letters to a Godson*). Heaven becomes open to us and we have a personal connection with our Creator through Jesus. Through our baptisms, our bodies become temples for the Holy Spirit. We become God-bearers. *"God's spirit is in you."*

Remember that *"you are everything to God."* God calls us by name. Just as God spoke to Jesus at his baptism and said this: *"You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased"* Mark 1: 11. God speaks to us at our baptisms and calls us God's beloved.



Early Sunday morning, January 10, **Eva Kakepetum** of this parish died in hospital of congestive heart failure. She was only in her 60's. Eva's late husband, **Abe Kakepetum**, is the artist of the painting we have in our Sacred Circle in the church. On Friday evening, Eva received her dying wish. In the presence of me and her devoted friend and confirmation sponsor, **Ann Camber**, our **Archbishop**

Anne received Eva into the Anglican Church of Canada via 'ZOOM'. Eva clutched her Bible and held it against her chest. Eva wanted to die as an Anglican. Eva re-affirmed her baptismal vows and made her promises with a strong and clear voice. Eva was listening to her baptismal song and she knew what awaited her and she was ready and eager to pass from this life into heaven.



God bless Eva (on the right, with **Bishop Lydia** at left, at the dedication of our Sacred Circle and of her husband's painting *The Sign*, September 29, 2019.)

Here is the song planted in Eva's heart at her baptism:

"Heaven is open to you. God's Spirit is in you. You are everything to God."

May we all hear our baptismal song and sing it every day of our life.

Amen.

Archdeacon Deborah+

The Renewal of Baptismal Vows

Let us give thanks to the Lord
our God.

**It is right to give our thanks
and praise.**

We thank you, Almighty God,
for the gift of water.

Over water the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation.

Through water you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In water your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the

Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.

We thank you, Father, for the water of baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in joyful obedience to your Son, we celebrate our fellowship in him in faith.

We pray that all who have passed through the water of baptism may continue for ever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory, now and for ever.

Amen.

Dear friends, let us renew the promises we made in baptism, when we rejected Satan and all his works, and promised to serve God faithfully in his holy catholic Church.

Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil and renew your commitment to Jesus Christ?

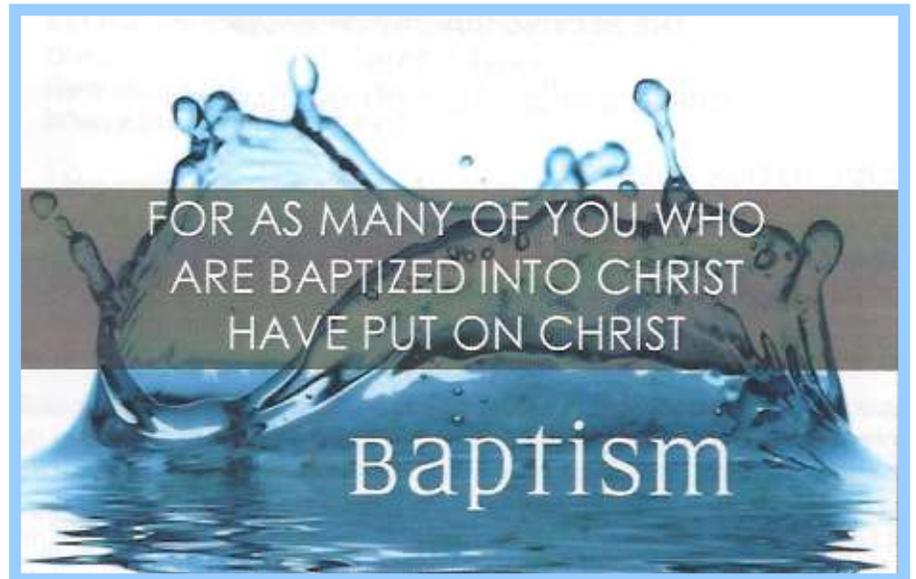
I do.

Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

I believe in Jesus Christ,



**his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again
to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.**

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread,
and in the prayers?

I will, with God's help.

Will you persevere in resisting evil and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and
return to the Lord?

I will, with God's help.

Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?

I will, with God's help.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself?

I will, with God's help.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of
every human being?

I will, with God's help.

Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of God's creation, and respect, sustain and
renew the life of the Earth?

I will, with God's help.

God the creator, the rock of our salvation,
has given us new birth by water and the Holy Spirit,
and bestowed upon us the forgiveness of sins,
through our Lord Jesus Christ.

May he keep us faithful to our calling, now and for ever.

Amen.