

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

January 11, 2025 (Baptism of Our Lord, Year C)
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Welcome to the Sunday of the Baptism of Our Lord. Today is one of the 4 major baptismal festivals of the church year. Some congregations save all their baptisms for one of these 4 festivals: the Baptism of Our Lord, the Vigil of Easter, the Day of Pentecost, and All Saints' Day. Of course, most of us aren't that PATIENT—baptisms are too EXCITING to wait that long. Heck, Wendy and I could barely get her grandparents to wait a few WEEKS for us to baptize Sam and Annabelle.

But the FESTIVALS of the church are the days that we celebrate the GIFT of baptism, OURS and ALL baptisms. And, on THIS Sunday, we celebrate the baptism of our LORD, Jesus Christ.

As we heard in our Gospel, the waters of baptism are part of Jesus' story. They're part of Jesus' OWN Epiphany, the revealing of his identity.

That's what this whole SEASON of Epiphany is about. The word "Epiphany" means "to reveal or make known." And from the very beginning, the STORIES we hear in the season of Epiphany draw us again and again to the REVEALING of his IDENTITY. WHO IS this person born in Bethlehem, "a light to reveal (God) to the nations"?

On the DAY of Epiphany, which began the SEASON of Epiphany on Tuesday, the reading marked the visit of the Magi to the Christ Child, and the GIFTS the Magi brought were GIFTS of identity: gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, myrrh for the embalming of a mortal body. In OUR reading, when the heavens opened up above Jesus' baptism, a voice said, "This is my Son, my Beloved." One of the most famous Epiphany readings is the wedding in Cana, when Jesus did the FIRST of his signs, the changing of water into fine wine, and in doing so, the story says, he "revealed his glory." And ON THROUGH the stories of Jesus' reading from the scroll of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to proclaim release to the captives," to the wondrous catch of fish in Galilee, to his transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, and again the words, "This is my beloved Son." In ALL these stories of Epiphany, Jesus' identity is revealed.

This is the SEASON of light, and AS his glorious light is revealed, his light starts to shine on US. As we learn more and more about WHO JESUS is, we also begin to understand more and more who WE are. THROUGH THESE STORIES, the waters of baptism BECOME STORIED WATER. HIS story becomes OUR story.

The story has earlier chapters too. It stretches all the way back to the waters of creation. Water's been part of the story of our salvation since the very beginning.

You may not have paid much attention to it before, but we RECITE this story every time we do a baptism. It's part of the baptismal service. It's a prayer that we say over the water, called a flood prayer. There are a huge number of OPTIONS that pastors can USE for that prayer, but what they all have in COMMON is that they recall the MULTITUDE of TIMES and WAYS that God USED water throughout the scriptures.

Listen to the one that I use. I've used it since my very first church, because I love the ENERGY of it. Listen to the words of this prayer. Listen for the STORY of what water HAS DONE and WILL do:

Blessed are you, O God, maker and ruler of all things. Your voice thundered over the waters at creation. You water the mountains and send springs into the valleys to refresh and satisfy us and all living things. Through the waters of the flood you carried those in the ark to safety. Through the sea you lead your people Israel from slavery to freedom. In the wilderness you nourished them with water from the rock, and you brought them across the river Jordan to the promised land. By the baptism of his death and resurrection, your Son Jesus has carried us to safety and freedom. The floods shall not overwhelm us, the deep shall not swallow us up, for

Christ has brought us over to the land of promise. He sends US to make disciples, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Pour out you Holy Spirit; wash away sin in this cleansing water; clothe the baptized with Christ; and claim you daughters and sons, no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male or female, but one with all the baptized in Christ Jesus, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

You see, this isn't JUST WATER! These are STORIED waters!

When Jesus was baptized, a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." And when WE are baptized, we're baptized INTO THAT STORY. We become PART of the story, and it becomes part of OUR story, becomes a part of US, part of WHO we ARE.

God claims US as God's beloved children. We're marked with the sign of the cross on our foreheads, and we're NAMED with THESE WORDS, "CHILD of GOD, you have been SEALED by the Holy Spirit and MARKED with the CROSS of Christ FOREVER."

Every one of you here today has heard those words spoken over you: "sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever." To be SEALED means that we are CLAIMED by God, we BELONG to God. NAMED, CLAIMED, AND MARKED, FOREVER. AS the BAPTIZED, we ARE GOD'S CHILDREN. So the words spoken to God's SON, are ALSO spoken to US: "You are my child, my Beloved; with YOU I am well pleased." Those are God's words to YOU: "YOU are my child. I love you. And I'm proud of you."

CHRIST'S story isn't just PART of our story; if you're a Christian, it IS our story. And it's the GREATEST story ever TOLD.

May we LIVE FAITHFULLY INTO God's story. God started WRITING the story of the salvation of the world at the very beginning, but that STORY ISN'T OVER. God's STILL WRITING it, and YOU are one of the MAIN characters. In YOU, in YOUR LIVES, in YOUR words and deeds, God is writing the NEXT CHAPTER of his SALVATION story.

So TELL the STORY. Tell YOUR story. What does the life of a baptized Christian LOOK like? What has your faith MEANT to you? What challenges have you endured? What has God DONE for you? What blessing have you received? You have SO MANY STORIES to TELL. And THERE ARE SO MANY that NEED to HEAR them.

You are a CHILD of GOD, WASHED in STORIED WATER. GO and TELL YOUR STORY. Amen.