

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

# First Sunday after the Epiphany

## The Baptism of our Lord

Year C

RCL

- [Isaiah 43:1-7](#)
- [Acts 8:14-17](#)
- [Luke 3:15-17, 21-22](#)
- [Psalm 29](#)

Last May, I had the privilege of baptizing my best friend's toddler in Seattle. It was a beautiful weekend. The sun was shining and the flowers were in bloom. After I baptized Artie, and the Rector anointed him with Holy Oil, the rector, Artie, and I proceeded to carry out the baptismal water into the congregation. We each splashed Holy Water on those in attendance. We've done that here at St. Andrew's during special services. But the one thing that really moved me was, when we sprinkled the water on the people, we also yelled, "Remember your baptism!" What does that mean to remember your baptism?

Some of us remember our baptisms when we experienced it as adults, like Jesus. Others of us, me included, can only remember them through the stories

of those who witnessed it. Still, some among have not been baptized but have attended a family member or friends or have seen one on the big screen.

Today, we remember Jesus' baptism. The church thinks this milestone is so important to remember that we remember it every single year without fail. It always falls on the Sunday following the Epiphany. Each baptism story is a little bit different depending on which Gospel, but the action is the same. John the Baptist appears on the scene, preaching a message about who is to come and what that will mean for the world. His message might even be a little frightening. Jesus shows up and joins the crowds to be baptized presumably by his cousin John. The heavens open, the spirit of God descends like a dove upon Jesus, and God speaks that Jesus is God's beloved son. These are simple details, the story isn't long, but this is the moment where his public ministry began.

In today's story from Luke, the Holy Spirit takes center stage. In this moment in Jesus' life, God communicates openly and directly through word and action. In our own lives, God communicates to us as well. What might we hear? It might sound something like what the Prophet Isaiah shares. It is a

message of comfort and reassurance to the Israelites who are in exile in Babylon. Even though they are frightened, looking toward an unknown future, God reassures them. God says, "Do not fear, I am with you. You are precious and honored and I love you. You are restored to wholeness. I have called you by name." Not only are these words of encouragement in dark times, but they speak about a ministry and a life very much like Jesus had. Jesus lived out and showed these words of Isaiah to everyone he met.

Just because we are God's beloved it doesn't mean that we will never have questions or doubts or get scared. It does not mean that we won't suffer or come upon difficult and confusing times. God does not promise that we will be protected from any hardships or danger. In a part of this Gospel passage removed from the lectionary today, John gets thrown in jail because he proclaimed this good news. And of course, we see this even in Jesus' own life and death. But one promise we hear is that God will guide us- accompany us through the waters, through the fire. God will gather us together. Unify us from parts far, far away, whether it be physical distance or ideological ones. Tear down barriers that some desire to build to divide us. Isaiah's message is

sometimes hard to believe because we're so used to living in a world that proclaims a vastly different message. Especially the message that we should be living in great fear at all times.

And, this is why we hear the story of Jesus' baptism every year. In the promises made at baptism, in the community of the faithful gathered, God is in the midst of us. Just as we can imagine Jesus waiting in the line of the crowds to be baptized. God has not abandoned us. Hope abounds even if it feels hopeless. These are not empty, greeting card platitudes. But simply put it's God's unrelenting love for the world God created and formed. And it's a message that we can all hear over and over again as a reminder of our own belovedness. Especially in the New Year. Especially in what we experience daily with the news of what's happening in our nation and the world. The people who got baptized with Jesus were filled with expectation, and because of God's promises to us, we too, can be filled with expectation. That there is room for hope in the here and now. That dawn breaks and gives light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

So, what comes to mind when you recall baptism? Maybe radiant, smiling families surrounding the one being baptized. Maybe it's seeing the faces of those in a congregation which surrounds the soon-to-be baptized one and promises to support that person. Maybe it's the water blessed and sprinkled. Whatever details come to mind, God is present. And in this act, we are reminded of God's love opening up the heavens and breaking into the world, a message we need to hear over and over again. A reminder that in that love we are strengthened to be God's heart and hands in the world. If you chose a piece of this text to take with you this week, it might be, "I am God's beloved, and God will use me to change the world." How? That's up to you and God. It could be to be the light which conquers the darkness. Or to be the voice of hope in desperation. To be the voice of peace in violence. To be the voice of equality for injustice. This is why we hear this story of Jesus' baptism every year. Through Jesus' story, we see our own. The world is full of God's beloved creation. Every day, start from this unrelenting, uncompromising place of love. And be the voice of Good News today.