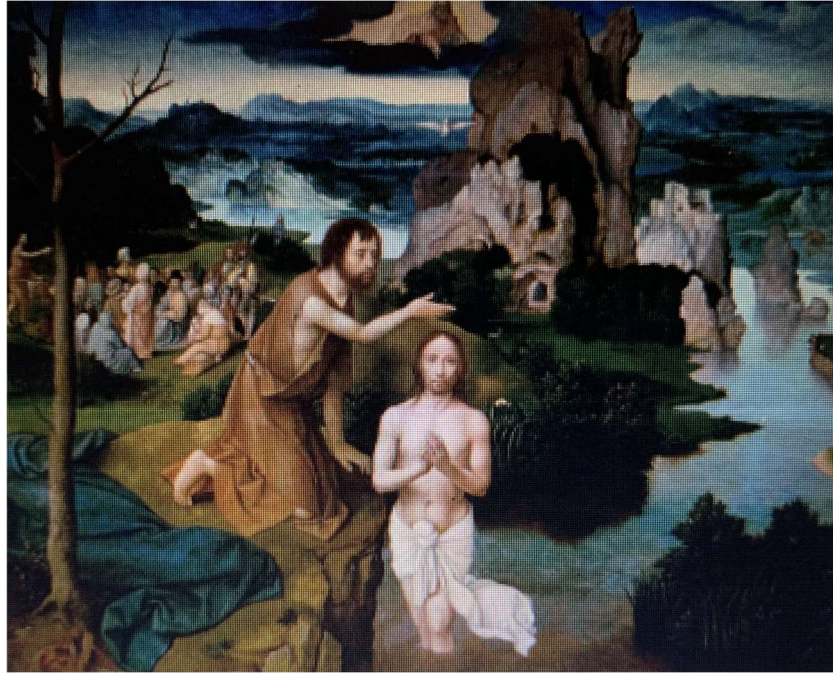


The Baptism of our Lord
Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22
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Jesus presented himself for baptism as an act of solidarity with a nation and a world of sinners. Jesus simply got in line with everyone who had been broken by the “wear and tear” of this selfish world and had all but given up on themselves and their God— when the line of down trodden and sin sick people formed in hopes of new beginnings.

This was freely his choice to identify fully with God’s creation which pleased God very much. We hear this in imagery this morning as he prays and the heavens open up with a dove descending upon him while hearing God’s voice of approval. This was acknowledgment in the midst of prayer.

When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, he heard a voice from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). These words revealed the true identity of Jesus as the beloved. Jesus truly heard that voice, and all of his thoughts, words, and actions came forth from his deep knowledge that he was infinitely loved by God. Jesus lived his life from that inner place of love.¹

¹ Henry Nowen - *You are the Beloved*

Although human rejections, jealousies, resentments, and hatred did hurt him deeply, he remained anchored in the love of the Father. At the end of his life, he said to his disciples, “Listen: the time will come—indeed has come when you will be scattered each going his own way and leaving me alone. And yet, I am not alone because the Father is with me. (John 16:32)

I often like to look at other biblical references with scripture. Eugene Peterson is a longtime pastor and teacher who paraphrased a bible from Greek and Hebrew into contemporary language. For me, this deepens the message from the traditional bibles I spend time with when I access it on occasion. Let’s listen in to some contemporary wording of the same Luke passage:

The interest of the people by now was building. They were all beginning to wonder, “Could this John be the Messiah?”

But John intervened. “I’m baptizing you here in the river. The main character in this drama, to whom I’m a mere stagehand, will ignite kingdom life; a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He’s going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He’ll place everything true in its proper place before God, everything false he’ll put out with the trash to be burned.

After all the people were baptized, Jesus was baptized. As he was praying, the sky opened up and the Holy Spirit, like a dove descending, came down on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice: “You are my son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life.”²

Can you understand that the words spoken to Jesus when he was baptized are also words spoken to you and to all who are brothers and sisters in Christ? Our tendency toward self-rejection and self-depreciation make it hard to hear those words and gather them into ourselves- to let them center into our hearts. If we can receive these words fully, and I believe we can get to a point where this is possible, we can become free of our compulsions to prove ourselves to the world.

In this way, we can live in the world while not being “of the world” In other words, we can live in it without belonging exclusively to it. Accepting that we are God’s beloved child, unconditionally loved, we can be sent into the world to act and speak as Jesus did.³

² Eugene Peterson - *The Message* - pg. 1869

³ *Ibid*

Questions for reflection: (choose a few that resonate with you- perhaps journal the answers).

1. As you think about your baptism, reflect on when it was, where it was, and who was there. Can you reimagine this day?
2. What difference does my baptism make in my life?
3. Are there ways that I can tell the Holy Spirit dwells in me?
4. Imagine if you do not already, the Holy Spirit coming to live within you. How does this make you feel and/or how is your life shaped by this?
5. Take some time and quiet yourself. Picture Jesus holding your face and looking into your eyes. He tells you, "You (your name here) _____ are my beloved. You are mine and I love you. How do you respond to this.
6. Looking to Acts 8:14-17: Peter and John laid their hands on the apostles and *they* received the Holy Spirit. As your Christian journey and baptism have bestowed this on you, what is your response?