

First Sunday after Epiphany 2022
The Baptism of our Lord
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Isaiah 43:1-7

Psalm 29

Acts 8:14-17

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

It's cold out.

The air is thin.

Thin because the low temperature keeps the air from holding humidity,
and it feels thin.

That's appropriate because we're in a thin time and a thin space.

That's Epiphany.

The time of the manifestation of the divine in this world that began
with the recognition of Jesus as the Son of God by the Magi.

Today we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord by John in the Jordan River.
And the Jordan is important.

God parted the Red Sea to save his people from the Egyptian army
and allow them to cross water on dry land.

When the Hebrews entered the promised land,

Joshua stationed the Ark of the Covenant in the Jordan

and the water stopped flowing so that the people crossed the river on dry land.

When the Prophet Elijah was taken up into heaven,

he passed his cloak to his student Elisha,

who had asked for a double portion of his divine power.

To test that the prophet's mantle had been passed,

Elisha struck the Jordan with the cloak

and the river parted so that he might cross it on dry land.

When Jesus entered the Jordan to be baptized by John,

it was not the river that parted but Heaven itself.

And we hear the Father say:

“This is my Son, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.”

And the Holy Spirit descends like a dove.

We find ourselves confronted with the first event
that brings together the elements of the Trinity.

The Son finds his way to the river Jordan,
the voice of the Father sounds out from Heaven,
and the Holy Spirit descends.

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for the first time, in one place at one time
It is a manifestation of the Trinity on Earth.

And Heaven is opened to the Earth and the Earth to Heaven, creating a thin space.

The thin space is described best in Celtic Spirituality as that moment, that place
where the separation of this world and the next becomes thin:
no longer opaque, but translucent, even transparent.

When we encounter these moments, they are hard to communicate.

I once experienced a thin space at my first church - Holy Cross.

Oh was I so green and untempered, too fresh to appreciate the moment.

It was Ash Wednesday, my second week as the Rector.

I was there alone most of the day.

We'd scheduled services at 6:30 a.m., noon, and at 7 p.m.

A couple of hours after the noonday service, I suddenly felt “alone.”

I had been by myself most of the day, but this was different.

I was suddenly aware of being engulfed by silence.

It was strange, it was freaky.

I didn't know what to think.

It was if I was surrounded by a bubble,

as if the building was contained within a bubble,

it was quiet, abnormally quiet. It was a truly profound silence.

It was not as if I hadn't experienced silence before.

I've practiced contemplative prayer, centering prayer, meditation.

And I had experienced thin spaces and times before.

I had sensed the presence of loved ones at the cemetery.
But still that Ash Wednesday I didn't realize what was happening.
I didn't appreciate the gift I was being given.

Rather than dwelling in that moment, which I would do now,
I drove off to Smith's to walk around and be with other people.
I drove over to Walgreen's to walk around and be around sounds.
At that time, I didn't know what to do with the experience.
Even now, I can only describe the experience in the vaguest terms,
not the emotional experience.
I am confined to metaphor and simile, and I reach for symbols.

Among the symbols today, this being the Baptism of the Lord,
we know the one of the symbols of Baptism - the Paschal candle.
We use the Paschal Candle at baptisms and funerals
and at Easter as the symbol of the light of Christ emerging from the tomb,
bringing a new light to the world,
a world in which that light had not shone before.

At the end of the baptismal service
we give the newly baptized a candle, and we say:
"This is the light of Christ, now you be a light to the world."
It's a daunting task to take the light of Christ into the world,
but that's what we are called to.

As we hear from Isaiah:
"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you."

We are called to righteousness in Christ.
Righteousness is not knowing right from wrong.
Righteousness is not following the rules.
Righteousness is about being in right relationship with God
and with those around us.
It's all about relationship, and this is a thin place.

It was into this thin place that God reached into this world
And melded the divine light of Christ into a human heart.

Christ – the loving face of God the Son:

In which we see ourselves reflected in eyes that shine with the love of God.

Epiphany is a thin time for us.

That's why it's important to be here and now,

to experience the thinness of Epiphany while we are in the season.

The season after Epiphany is a long one this year

Lent doesn't come till March, but it will come,

and soon enough for us to think of our sins and change.

Now is a time to be with God in the thinness of the Epiphany.

In the midst of winter as we begin to see the length of the days growing longer,

let us wonder at the manifestation of the divine in this world,

to welcome the miracles of each sunrise and each sunset,

and the wonder of those first green buds that will come with spring,

and know the wonder of the lives we touch each and every day.

As we reach for God in these thin times,

we can remember the gift of Christ to our world

and hope to stand before God on our last day, and say:

 this was my life,

 these are those I loved,

 this is what I have done with the life I was given.

And we hope to hear our heavenly Father say:

“This is my child, my beloved,

in whom I am well pleased.”

Amen.