

Sermon for First Sunday after Epiphany
The Baptism of our Lord
January 8, 2023
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Los Alamos, New Mexico

Isaiah 42:1-9
Psalm 29
Acts 10:34-43
Matthew 3:13-17

It's all about water and the spirit.
It's how we are born, both bodily and spiritually as Christians.

We are held in the water of life in our mother's womb
until we break forth into the air and learn to breathe of this world.

With that first inhalation we take in the spirit of this world,
and it will be with our last exhalation of this world
that we will prepare to breathe of the spirit of the next world.
And in between we live our lives.

Recently, I was involved in a discussion about who we are as humans.
Are we spirit learning to live in the flesh?
Or are we flesh learning to live in the spirit?

I believe we are both,
and we spend our lives working to achieve a balance,
to nourish both equally
so that neither the flesh or the spirit
suffers from the hunger for the other,
but relishes in the wonder of each.

Today we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus,
and I can see no better evidence
of the joining of the flesh and the spirit
than in the story of that event as portrayed in Matthew.

Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan,
to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be
baptized by you,
and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him,
"Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way
to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.
And when Jesus had been baptized,

just as he came up from the water,
suddenly the heavens were opened to him
and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove
and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said,
“This is my Son, the Beloved,
with whom I am well pleased.”

In this one instance we find the flesh and the spirit
uniting in the waters of Baptism
in the presence of all three elements of the Trinity.
The manifestation of the Trinity
Where $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$

Here we have the Father
expressing approval of the Son
as the Holy Spirit descends from Heaven in the form of a dove.

Have you ever watched how doves descend?

It is a vivid memory for me the last time Linda and I were in Italy.
We were in Assisi with the Santa Fe Women's Ensemble
to sing for the Mass at the Cathedral of St. Francis.

I spent an hour or so just enjoying a garden in Assisi.
It was the first truly beautiful day we'd had
because the early summer rains
had turned most of the afternoons into swimming meets.

As I watched I noticed that birds were playing
off a row of Lombardy Poplars.
When I looked closer, I saw they were doves.
Each dove in turn would fly off from its perch
and flap its wings furiously until it was flying straight up.
Then when it had exerted all its energy climbing,
the dove would fold its wings and turn and dive
straight toward the ground.
Then, at the last moment, it would spread its wings to catch the wind.

They dive just as the Scriptures describe,
head down, wings spread, descending to bless the Created World.

The verse of Psalm 29 reminds us of the creation story in Genesis:
“The Voice of the Lord is upon the waters,”
when the Spirit of God moved over the deep,
and the declaration that all Creation is “Good.”

Of course, the subsequent stories in the Old Testament
remind us how things were messed up,

and broken away from the good of its union with God.
We pray in our Eucharistic Prayers
that we were given the world to care for,
and we didn't do what we were supposed to,
and we denied the goodness of the world and ourselves
and betrayed the trust of our creation.

But God did not abandon us,
and Jesus restored our relationship with the Almighty
through our Baptism.

In the Baptism of Jesus by John, the nature of Baptism changed.
John proclaimed a Baptism of repentance for sins.
Our Christian Baptism
enters us into the death and resurrection of Jesus.
When Jesus was baptized, the voice of God proclaimed
"this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased,"
and the Holy Spirit came down.
With his Baptism,
Jesus reunited the waters of creation with the divine,
making the Creation once again entirely Good,
with everyone, with everything.

Too often we see Jesus the Christ as the Lord of the Church,
but Jesus is Lord of everything, of all creation, of the universe.

The Roman Catholic theologian Teilhard de Chardin
wrote of a theology of creation that he called
the "Baptism of the Universe."

By this he conceived the role of humans
is to baptize everything and everyone
to bring them into relationship with God
to reveal the divine plan for all that is.

Baptizing the Universe brings us
into the flow of divine energy
so we can recognize God's presence,
which unites us with all of Creation.

Too often we think of Jesus as only the property of believers,
but Jesus is one with everyone.
He proclaimed the Good News to all of creation,
and that includes all of us,
whether we realize or not.
We are called by our Baptismal Covenant
to share in the Life of Christ,
to treat everyone as our neighbor,

and to make sure that justice comes to everyone.

The Baptism of Jesus

is not something that just tells us about an event in Jesus' life.

It is rather the revelation of a plan of redemption
and renewal that gathers up all our efforts
into a mysterious and evolutionary process of salvation,
a divine plan that eventually will culminate
in the sanctification of the Universe.

Until that day, our task is to work toward that sanctification every day in our own lives by
living into our Baptismal covenant.

So please turn in your bulletins to page five and let us renew our Baptismal vows: