

## **Baptism of our Lord, 2021, January 10, Sermon**

(Mk 1:1-11; Ps 29; Gen 1:1-5; Acts 19:1-7)

The holy gospel according to Mark, the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter:

***The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”—“a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”***

***And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”***

***At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”***

Do you know what the first four words of the Bible are? . . . . ***In the beginning God.*** . . . .

***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. . . . And six days later, God saw everything that he had made, and behold! it was very good. . . . .***

***In the beginning*** of the Gospel of Mark, John the Baptist came to prepare the people for God-in-the-flesh. Sinners weighed down by their guilt came to the Jordan River. There John dunked their sweat-stained, dusty bodies under the water as a sign of their repentance, a deep desire to turn their lives around. A public statement that their heart was changed.

***In the beginning*** of Jesus’ ministry, the Son of God came from Nazareth in Galilee to be baptized by John in the Jordan. And all creation was changed.

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**As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart.** “The heavens” were God’s dwelling place, the place where God lived in his holiness, apart from sinful humankind. All good Jews knew that God’s holiness couldn’t tolerate sin. That’s why he stayed up in heaven.

But here, at the River Jordan, religion was turned upside down. What everybody *knew* wasn’t true anymore. God had come down to earth in human form, to live and work, suffer and die as one of us. And in so doing, God also tore an opening between his heavenly dwelling and the earth he created. An opening that revealed God’s deep and abiding love for Jesus, and through Jesus, for *all people of every time and every place*.

**In the beginning God.** In the beginning of your life of faith, *you* were baptized. Not in the Jordan, but in water just as wet, just as God-given—and probably a lot cleaner!

For Jesus, his baptism was a demonstration of his obedience to God. He became one of many publicly committing their lives and their ways to God’s guidance.

For most of you, baptism wasn’t a choice—it was a matter of being born into a family that valued life in grace, life with God, the fellowship of believers. Most of you were baptized as infants and have no memory of that life-changing event.

But it *did* change you! From that moment on you not only *belonged* to God. You were a *part* of God. The Holy Spirit took up residence in your heart when you were signed with that invisible tattoo of the cross on your forehead—*sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever*. From that moment on, you’ve never been apart from God.

**In the beginning God.** When Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were torn open and a voice proclaimed to him, **You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.**

Do you know what the next words in Mark’s gospel are? **At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.**

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The baptism of Jesus was the beginning of his ministry. The same ministry we've been baptized into! Every day Jesus calls us anew to follow him into the various wildernesses of our lives, and of our life together. Can you hear his voice?

He calls us, as always, to care for the last, the least, the little, the lonely, and the lost: those who have no voice, or whose voices can't be heard above the rantings and ravings and selfish obsessions of our western world today.

You know who these people are: the homeless, hungry; victims of prejudice: racial, religious, age; those who are differently-abled; those living with mental illness, despair, hopelessness, abuse of any kind; those incarcerated; those trapped in lies and greed.

"Wash off the old dirt, shake the dust of sin from your feet. God has created a new day and a new way. Come walk with me out of the darkness into the light of day" (*Christian Century*, December 22-29, 1999, p. 1249, Mary W. Anderson).

*You have been chosen by God, sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever!* That makes all the difference in the world!

Thanks be to God!

**In the beginning God.** When you were baptized God tore open the heavens and said, **You are my child, my beloved; with you I am well pleased.**