

The Rev'd Wayne Nicholson
St. John's Episcopal Church, Mount Pleasant
10th January 2010
Epiphany 1 C – The Baptism of Our Lord
Isaiah 43:1-7 Acts 8:14-17
Psalm 29

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

The Lord has shown forth his glory: Come let us adore him. ¹ *Amen.*

It's all about grace, friends. It's *all* about grace.

We've gone fast-forward the past week. Only sixteen days ago Jesus was born of a woman, God incarnate lying in a manger. Only nine days ago we celebrated his Holy Name. Only four days ago was the Epiphany – the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

And now today the infant is no longer – he's about thirty years old, give or take. His cousin John the wildman is preaching to the crowds crying "Repent!" and calling the conservatives "You brood of vipers!" and baptizing left and right, cleansing the people so that they will be ready for the coming of the Lord.

"Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work." (*Luke 3:21-23*)

That last line, "Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work" – that's important to place his baptism in context. And it's *very* important to place God's words, "You are my Beloved" in context .

What does it mean to be chosen, to be blessed by the Holy Spirit, to be beloved of God, to be filled with grace?

How, when, where – do we see the Holy Spirit alive and well in the people around us, in the work we are given to do, and in the ministries we offer and the ministries we receive?

How does the Holy Spirit embrace us as we emerge from the water of baptism – and how does the Holy Spirit love us as we emerge from the fires of our own torment, our own despair, our own grief, our own personal?

¹ Book of Common Prayer, p. 81.

It seems to me that God's pronouncement - "You are my Son, the Beloved" - is a declaration of love. Not just to Jesus, but to all of humanity, which is somehow encapsulated into the body of God in Christ Jesus.

What sort of responsibilities are laid upon us at that moment?

Some of you were baptized as infants or very young children - someone made this declaration on your behalf. Some of you were baptized when you were older, and you made these promises on your own. I think it behooves each of us to recall the vows made at our Baptism, because they give an enhanced meaning to our resurrection through the waters, and I invite you now to take a look at them.

I invite you to open your Books of Common Prayer, to page 304, about ¾ of the way down the page.

"Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?"

Will you, in other words, be faithful members of this parish community and faithful members of the larger body of Christ that is the universal church?

"Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?"

Will you, in other words, endeavor to live a godly life, confessing when you have done wrong, repenting and reconciling yourselves with those you have harmed?

"Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?"

Will you, in other words, proclaim the love of God for all of God's children? Will you be a light shining in the darkness of a troubled and broken world?

"Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?"

Will you, in other words, do your very best to *see* the essence of Christ in every person you encounter? Those you love - and those you find difficult to love?

"Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?"

Will you, in other words, *promote* justice and peace? Will you speak against oppression, discrimination, injustice, and violence? Will you regard every human being as a gift from God?

These are the vows we make at our baptism – and you have just repeated the promises that *you* made or the promises made on your behalf, signaling the love of God poured out upon you by the Holy Spirit.

God's love of Jesus Christ only moments after his baptism, and only moments before he begins his ministry, is a revelation of love, a revelation of God's relationship with humankind, a reminder that through thick and thin, God is there. Here. With us. Incarnate. Infusing creation with love.

We've got to let that love flow. We need to accept that love, to delight in it, and to return it. When we fully accept God's love for all humanity, the real work of Christmas will begin, because we won't be able to hold back. We'll strain against the tethers that control us, aching to spread the good news of God in Christ Jesus. We'll become evangelists. Apostles. Responding to God's love, God's mercy, God's justice with a resounding "YES!"

And the kingdom of God will be a bit closer.

Amen