

Genesis 1:1-5
Psalm 29
Acts 19:1-7
MARK 1:4-11

“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Mark 1:11 (NRSV)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus’ baptism is in the prologue of Mark’s Gospel, and its purpose in Mark’s Gospel is the same as the beautiful, poetic prologue in John’s Gospel. Both establish Jesus’ identity. Both provide the foundation for his ministry. In very different ways, the two Gospels are saying the same thing. Watch this person. Learn from this person. From him, you will learn of God.

Jesus baptism was the beginning of God’s work through him for our redemption, and it speaks to us of our baptism.

Baptism was an important rite in many religions from very ancient times, so John’s preaching and baptizing in the Jordanian wilderness was probably not all that unusual. Just before his Ascension, Jesus commanded his followers to go into the world baptizing. And the book of Acts and the Epistles tell us that baptism was a central and critical rite in the life of the infant church.

Over the centuries and in various Christian traditions, baptism has been practiced in different ways and understood in many different ways. Again, our lesson from Acts is important for telling us about the early association between baptism, the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. According to Acts speaking in tongues was a most important sign that someone had been baptized in the name of Jesus. Some still hold that speaking in tongues is a sign of true baptism. If you do not speak in tongues, something is wrong. Now, I do not believe that. Why should I? I have never spoken in tongues. For that matter I have seen or presided at many, many baptisms, and I have never witnessed anyone speaking in tongues after they were baptized. I have heard many infants make some rather vigorous and loud comments about the proceedings, but I do not believe that we can classify those as speaking in tongues. Well, Ava, we will have to see what your response will be.

No matter the age, tradition or interpretation of baptism, baptism has always been seen as making the baptized a part of a community, Christ’s church. Also, present in all of the traditions is the conviction that baptism establishes a new identity.

Paul in his letter to the Romans makes the earliest and one of the most dramatic declarations about our new identity and life through baptism.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. Romans 6:3-4 (NRSV)

Martin Luther said that baptism is “the daily garment which the Christian is to wear all of the time.”

After Ava's baptism, Fr. Hubbard, using chrism, will mark her forehead with the sign of the cross and say to her: "Ava, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever." *BCP* p. 208 (1979)

All of these say that in baptism Ava, you and all of us, have received a new identity. It is not an identity of perfection that says we never will or never should sin or always get everything right. It is not an identity that can in anyway allow us to be self-righteous or gives us the right to judge others. It is an identity based in God's action through Christ for us. In fact, when Luther spoke of baptism as a daily garment, he was in part saying that the arch or action of baptism of being brought low, washed and raised up is the pattern of our daily life. He was saying that each day Christians gets up, recognize their own sinfulness and failures, remember the grace given them in their baptism and then live out their lives invigorated by the assurance of God's forgiveness.

Ava, throughout your life many people and many groups will try to define who you are, put a label on you, or give you an identity. Many of those will be descriptive—that you are young, that you are short, that you are a girl, that you are in school, etc. The possibilities are endless. Most of them may seem harmless, but as you grow you will come to realize that most identities given to you by the world, and by others are for their good and less so yours. You will also be exposed to many who try to give you identities that will allow them to control and use you. They may even try to give you an identity that will limit, harm or even kill you.

You also may be tempted to seek your identity in many different places. Many of us seek our identity from a peer group, a skill, a profession, or a goal. Some place their identity in sexual appeal, youthfulness, or possessions. Ava, there are a thousand places you can seek your identity besides the one given to you today in baptism.

In the name of Christ, resist all of them. You are not who the world says you are, and no identity than you find in the world is complete or fully true. You are who God says you are in your baptism today—my beloved for whom I sent my only son to redeem you.

Austin Farrer, English clergy, theologian and close friend of C. S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien put it this way:

We cannot be baptized without being baptized into his baptism: and the unity we have with him both in receiving baptism and afterwards in standing by it, brings down on us the very blessing and the very Spirit he received. In so far as we are in Christ, we are filled with Holy Ghost, and the Father's good pleasure rests upon us; infinite Love delights in us. *The Triple Victory* p. 32 (1935)

The Catechism at the back of *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979) says:

Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God.

What does it mean to be made a member of Christ's Body, the Church? Is it like joining any other organization? Is it primarily about keeping the organization going? Is it about participating when we get a chance? Is being a member about attending a service on Sunday's when it is convenient or when there is nothing else to do?

In the middle of the service, after the Parents and Godparents have made their baptismal promises on behalf of Ava, Fr. Hubbard will turn to Christ's gathered Body and ask, "Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support this person in her life in Christ?" The response indicated for the *People* is "We will."

As Jesus was raised from the waters of baptism, he saw the heavens being ripped open and the Holy Spirit descending on him. He heard the voice of God saying: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." What we did not read in today's Gospel lesson was that that same Spirit drove him into the wilderness to be tempted and after that to begin his public ministry of teaching, preaching and healing.

Baptism is both gift and task. In baptism, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, deliverance from sin and death, adoptions as God's children and incorporation into Christ's Body, the Church. The task we are given is the process of becoming what we have been made in baptism and —the Body of Christ.

In the service of baptism, we focus on the one being baptized and perhaps her or his parents. But the service also focuses on us, the gathered Community/ the Body of Christ. In our daily life we often think of the church as an organization with a legal structure, boards, committees, employees, budgets, goals and real estate. In this place at least, we focus just as much, if not more, on the many, many ministries that are a part our life here at St. Barnabas—ministries that we do as a whole Church and ministries, known and unknown to most, that each of us does in and through our daily lives.

Being a part of Christ's Body, the Church, is to be a part of a formation/growing community. Being baptized and made a part of Christ's Church is not something that happens and that's it. Just as it was for Jesus, our baptism is just the beginning. When Jesus was baptized he was driven into the wilderness to wrestle with the most basic questions of whom he was and what he was to do. Again and again throughout his life, we find him alone, with his Father, in prayer. If we study the scriptures carefully, we realize that those times were a critical part of Jesus' life and ministry. When we reply to that question with "We will", we are saying that we will be there for Ava to support her with love, example, resources and ministries to help her in her growth as a child of God. We are also saying that we will, as a community, be there for each other. All of us are called to a life of formation. God is never done with us, and as we live, grow and minister, we need one another. As members of Christ's Body, we are also members one of another. We may say that we are not theologically educated, we may try to demure saying we do not have talents, we may find a million reasons why we cannot or should not be expected to be an active, growing part of Christ's Body supporting the growth and work of one another, but God has given us all gifts, God given all of us the Holy Spirit, God has given all of us ministry. God has given us the joyous opportunity and gift of supporting Ava in her life and growth in Christ. God has given us the joy of a community to be there to support us in our life, growth and ministry in and for Christ.

Amen.

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