

## Baptized and Beloved

Baptism of our Lord: Mark 1:4-11: Year B

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John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

*The assurance we have as Baptized Christians that God is at work just behind the scenes of what we see. Jesus experienced a secret epiphany during His baptism. Our unexposed baptisms are seen as we live out our baptismal callings. We are beloved!*

God's grace and peace be with you this day – in this new year!

Have you ever watched a young child playing when they are deep in their imaginations? What we see from the outside are the plastic figures being moved from place to place. What we cannot see is the imaginary fight against good and evil going on in that child's mind. There are creatures of all sizes and shapes. The landscape is barren with a few bushes here and there; maybe a rock to hide behind. There is emotion and passion and lines delivered with energy either out loud or silently within.

"OK- you go around from behind. I'll draw them out from the cave!"

As adults all we see is the beige carpet and our grandson holding two plastic figures. But so much more is there! So much more is happening inside his creative imagination. It is just right there....and it's not.

In Mark's telling of Jesus' baptism, Jesus is the only one to experience the vision and hear God's voice. There are no crowds, just John and Jesus. Yet it seems not even John gets the benefit of the vision or hearing God's voice. The text says, *"And just as he was coming up out of the water, he (Jesus) saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Mk 1:10-11)*

This is a secret epiphany directly from God the Father to Jesus the Son in two ways. First, the Holy Spirit is made manifest in a vision of a dove which comes down from the heavens to alight on Jesus. Secondly, then Jesus hears God's voice speak. *"You are my son. You are the Beloved. With you I am well pleased."*

Jesus knows who He is without any public verification, without any outside objective assessment except for the divine. God has one word for God's Son. "You are my son, my beloved." This is a very private event between Father and Son, which in Mark's Gospel, no one else knows about.

For many of the major milestones in our lives, you and I usually have documentation. We learn to drive, we get a drivers' license. We get married, there is a marriage certificate. We have passports, insurance cards and any other documentation to bring assurance from the issuing party that we are who we say we are. Or that the events in our lives have truly taken place.

Not for Jesus. There is no baptismal certificate. Only God pulling open the heavens. In that moment of time, Jesus is allowed a glimpse of heaven...a glimpse of God working behind the scenes. Like the child's imagination, Jesus sees and hears the reality of what is usually not seen with the naked eye. God comes to Jesus in the form of a dove. God's voice comes through loud and clear.

Why is this so important? It's important because as NT Wright says, "A good deal of Christian faith is a matter of learning to live by this different reality even when we can't see it." (Mark for Everyone. Westminster. John Knox Press. Louisville, Kentucky. 2004. Pg 5)

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Imagine noticing a set of wet adult footprints nearby a pool. You don't know who it was that walked there. You can't tell exactly when it happened, or if it was a man or a woman. All you see is the evidence of the reality that a person did walk there, but you never saw them go by. You know this by the wet remnants of their footprints on the cement, and only that.

Christian faith is a matter of learning to live by this different reality even when we can't see it. What is this hidden reality? It's the hidden dimension of God's world: the reality of God at work right behind the scenes in our lives even when we cannot perceive God's presence or work.

Jesus' baptism was His commissioning. With God's affirmation, even in private, Jesus knew who He was and what He was to be about.

The same is true for us! That cross on our foreheads is yet invisible to the naked eye. I mean, I'm guessing no one has ever asked to see your baptismal certificate to open a checking account or renew an insurance policy! Yet the God who claimed us in baptism uses it all the time. All we ever have to do, in public or in private is to trace that cross. When we do, we know again our calling, and we know we are loved.

On this weekend, know we are beloved! Put your name in verse 11, "This is my beloved son, Jeff." "This is my beloved daughter, Susan." Say it and hear God speaking directly to you. "You are my dear, dear child. You amaze me with delight. I love you. I love you."

No one needs to know you are saying it to yourself in line at the bank, as you wait nervously at the doctor's office, or in the midst of a challenging conversation. This is God's silent, even secret affirmation of each one of us. God says, "I love you!"

If you doubt it, remember that "God sees us not as we are ourselves, but as we are in Jesus Christ." (Wright, Mark for Everyone. Ibid.) When God looks at us, God sees us through the Beloved Son Jesus. We can never doubt, never doubt, we are loved.

Second, continue to trust and live by God's hidden work in this world. Trust that so much more is there! So much more is happening that we cannot even see. The Dr's report has bad news. Yet after the nurse leaves the room, you notice her wet footprints behind her.

Your child is struggling and after a challenging conversation, you see their wet footprints on the floor. Here is one whom God loves. God is still present, forming and shaping both of you. That's a promise.

We don't need any outside assessment. It's right there all the time. (Make the sign of the cross on your forehead) Anytime day or night no matter what has happened during our day. "You are my child and I love you."

Amen!