

The Christening of Jesus

Matthew 3:13-17 Isaiah 42:1-9

This Sunday observes the Baptism of Jesus by John. Now, just because christening over time became a synonym for baptism: isn't this title "the christening of Jesus" a bit of a stretch, not to mention redundant (Christ was christened?!#) ? Yes . . . except for another meaning "christening" has. Ships are christened at the time of their launching, when they slide off the slipways and into the water for which they were made. Jesus engaged in no act of public ministry until after his baptism. Then, and only then, does the work of Jesus set sail.

At ship christenings, vessels are given names. Jesus already had a name given to him some thirty years past. But now, Matthew records the bestowing of three other "names" on Jesus at baptism. They are names reflective of how Jesus is known and held by God. *My Son (Child)*: an assurance by God of the relationship that binds them together. *My Beloved*: an affirmation of the love at the heart of that relationship. *The One with whom I am well pleased*: a declaration of God's delight in this relationship. The Spirit's descent on Jesus becomes a visible sign of God's presence. So in-spired, Jesus goes forward to engage in ministry named and embraced by God.

So what does Isaiah, and this particular passage from it, have to do with Jesus' baptism and Matthew's narrative? Isaiah also speaks of God's threefold "naming" this expected one in ways that parallel Matthew. *My Servant . . . My Chosen . . . (the one) in Whom my soul delights*. But Isaiah goes a step further to declare the ministries for which this Servant has been christened:

"I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open eyes that are blind, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, from prison those who sit in darkness."

Those words closely parallel ones read by Jesus at Nazareth's synagogue (Luke 4:18-19). Such words christened the launching of Jesus' ministry. Such words would still christen our ministries in Christ's name. Ministries whose foundation is anchored in God's naming of us in baptism as Beloved Children, Chosen Servants, in whom God delights and is well-pleased.

For Reflection and Action:

What light does Jesus' baptism shed on our own baptismal identity and calling?

When or how have you experienced those "names" bestowed on Jesus as your own?

For what may God be "christening" you now?