

Isaiah 42:1-9

Matthew 3:13-17

Acts 10:34-43

“May the Lord give strength to people.
May the Lord bless us with peace!” AMEN!

This festival day of the Baptism of our Lord is
the first time, in Matthew, where we experience
Jesus as an adult.

Bible experts ponder that Jesus would
have been around 31 years old,

which means the days of him being cared for
by his parents are long gone.

A huge gap of time around his life is missing
from Matthew’s testimony, but that doesn’t mean
that time didn’t exist.

So, it’s important, I think, that we ought to honor
the many people who made it possible for Jesus
to arrive to this point of his life.

Shouldn’t we be able to consider that,
without these other people,

Jesus would not have made it to adulthood,
much less his baptism, without people in his life
and the community around him?

Shouldn’t we be able to consider that,

without those people and communities listening to God and protecting the vulnerable,

Jesus might not have made it as far as he did?

It's not a hard stretch to say "yes."

For children in the first century experienced very high mortality rates.

Like 50% of children died before they reached the age of 10.

Fifty percent!

Whether by disease, poverty, infanticide, war, or malnutrition - half of all people born never reached adulthood.

Jesus also had other threats upon his life, of course.

Joseph and Mary whisked Jesus away to Egypt for his safety and security.

Consider the ways these two put themselves at risk to carry Jesus to birth and then emigrate to safety.

Consider the ways the community of Nazareth welcomed them back and protected Jesus during his growth through adolescence.

The magi learned that Herod wanted Jesus dead,
and changed their route home to
avoid crossing paths with that old fox again.

Those wise strangers celebrated the child, Jesus,
and protected him.

All of those actions, from the Wise Ones,
from Mary and Joseph, and from
the community made them enemies of the state.

Even amidst the dangers of empire
they chose honor and acted in ways that
ensured Jesus to grow and move into his role.

Their actions of protection potentially could have
led to their own arrest and execution.

Yet, still they protected him.

These, along with many we don't know about,
with the guidance of the divine,
protected Jesus. (AMEN!)

I'd like us to be invited to consider
the people and communities in our own lives

who have protected nurtured our faith journeys and
the ways we are called to support, care for,

and protect others as the body of Christ.

Many of us are self-sufficient (to an extent) now,
but it was not always that way.

There have been people and communities that
have brought us to this day, and to be the people,
God is leading us to be. (Pause)

Dare I say, that this is a perfect day and way
to think of the folks joining the body of St. Stephen.

They bring experiences, stories, and
accounts of God working in their lives into
the long story of St. Stephen.

This congregation is enriched by them, and
those of us who've been here a while are eager
to hear their stories and grow in new relationship
with one another.

They likely have each been protected and protectors, too.

I pray that they are enriched by our presence
as I am by theirs. (Pause)

Let me share this story with you as an illustration.

Fifteen year old Emily lost her mother to cancer,
and several weeks after the funeral she slipped
back into church.

Each Sunday she'd leave quickly after church
so as to not have to talk to anyone.

In that same church, an 82 year old man, Walter,
had lost his wife a few days before
their 60th anniversary.

He still sat in the same spot where
they'd worshipped together for years.

One Sunday, Emily broke down during the prayers
and slipped into the narthex alone to weep.

Walter got up during the final hymn because
he took a little extra time with his cane and
came across Emily as he put on his coat
in the narthex.

Walter recognized the look on Emily's face
because he'd been wearing that look for months
after his wife died.

The thing that happened next was next to amazing.
Walter didn't give a speech.

He didn't promise that "things will get better."

He simply leaned on his cane and said,
loud enough for just her to hear,

“It’s hard to walk into this place when
the one you came with before
isn’t here anymore.”

Emily, with tears said,

“I miss her so much I can’t breathe.” (Pause)

Sometimes protection comes by actively
guarding someone from danger and sometimes
it comes by quietly relating to what
another person is going through and
and then committing
to walk alongside them.

This is not only a spiritual practice,
it’s a human practice.

As we recount Jesus’ baptism,
it is a time to honor the many people
who aided him in getting to the Jordan River.

It is a time to recall that,
despite the threats and powers of cultural norms,
people took risks in caring for our Lord.

Might it invite us to a time when we review
the role of church and community, and
to be mindful of protection and
nurturing one another.

AMEN!