



## **Baptism of Christ Sunday**

**January 10th, 2021**

*Twin Towers United Methodist Church*

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## **WORSHIP GUIDE**

*Before you begin your time of worship, find a comfortable place to be and gather whatever you might need: your Bible, your Advent candles, something to write on and with, your computer/connected device (if you intend to listen to music online), etc. Feel free to adapt this worship guide in any way that makes best sense to you and those you might be gathered with. (Consider inviting someone – a friend, a family member – to worship with you.) Commit to spending the next hour with God.*

**PRELUDE** - Listen and sing along to a song or hymn that blesses and centers your spirit!

### **WELCOME -**

The heavens open. The Spirit descends.

**Jesus emerges from the water.**

A voice echoes through the blue expanse.

**"This is my child, the Beloved, with whom I am well-pleased."**

Jesus is named. Claimed.

**We come to the water.**

**We remember we are named. Claimed.**

Can it be so?

What a thing to be named. Claimed.

**Let us open our hearts and lives to the one who names us Beloved,  
and claims us still.**

**CENTERING HYMN** - "Water, River, Spirit, Grace" TFWS 2253

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1eRpNP7iJY>

Water, River, Spirit, Grace,  
sweep over me, sweep over me!  
Recarve the depths your fingers traced  
in sculpting me, in sculpting me

**CENTERING PRAYER** – *You are invited to take a deep breath as you pray:*

Creating, Calling, and Faithful God,

we come to this time and place to be with you,  
to worship you, and to learn from you.  
As we remember the story of Jesus' baptism,  
may our spirits be opened to the wonder and possibility,  
once again, of hearing you call us "Child".  
May our hearts be invigorated by your grace sweeping over us,  
Sculpting us into your "Beloved".  
May our lives be made ready to follow Jesus  
Without reservation and full of courage. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE - Mark 1:4-11 / NRSV**

<sup>4</sup> 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."

This is the Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God!**

**LISTEN -**

Who are we? Do you ever find yourself asking that question, perhaps triggered by challenging moments or difficult times? I know that in our family, Steven and I most often raise this question and grapple with it when faced with exceptional behavior. I can hear us saying to Milo or Imani, "That is not who we are! In this family, we do not...(fill in the blank)" or "This is who we are! In this family, we will...(fill in the blank)".

Who are we? Remembering, affirming, and asserting who we are (or are not) feels especially important in the midst of crisis, doesn't it? It helps us make sense of what's happening, why

it's happening, even how what's happening could be happening in our midst. It also helps us to discern how to respond. Remembering, affirming, and asserting who we are anchors us and guides us at all times and all places, but especially in the face of challenging, disruptive and even traumatic moments, doesn't it?

In the immediate aftermath of Wednesdays' violent riot/insurrection/terrorist attacks on the capitol and our democracy, I heard people from every direction grappling with the question of who we are. In his first tweet referencing what was happening, President- Elect Biden began, "Let me be very clear: the scenes of chaos at the Capitol do not represent who we are." When he delivered remarks shortly thereafter, Biden reiterated, "The scenes of chaos at the Capitol do not reflect a true America. Do not represent who we are." Later, he went on, "...America is about honor. Decency, respect, tolerance — that's who we are, that's who we've always been." But is it? Biden got plenty of push back on his version and vision of who we are. A colleague of mine serving in Reno, the Rev. Kristen Gallagher wrote, "This is who we are. We are a country riddled with white supremacy, entitlement, and violence. We are a country where wearing a simple mask seems too big an infringement on the rights of enough people that a controllable virus is rampantly running amok and killing thousands every day. We are a country that sees (quoting Rev. Jackui Lewis) "black grief as a threat and white rage as a sacrament". Who are we? These are pretty different understandings of who we are as a nation. One points to honor, decency, and respect and the other to white supremacy, entitlement, and violence. One names what happened as an aberration, an anomaly, confined to a small group of "extremists" and therefore unreflective of or unrelated to who we are, while the other names it as emblematic, as exactly in line with who we are.

Who are we? Who are we as a nation? Who are we as individual citizens and residents of this country? Who are we as lovers of God and disciples of Jesus watching Wednesdays' events unfold? Who are we?

In today's scripture, we watch as Jesus undergoes a defining moment, a declarative moment about who he is. Mark tells us, in line with the other gospel writers, that at Jesus' baptism, as he is emerging from the waters of the Jordan River, "a voice came from heaven" and declared, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." God explicitly names and claims Jesus: Son, Beloved. Jesus then lives the rest of his short but powerfully impactful life anchored in and guided by this identity.

But that identity - of being God's child, being the Divine's Beloved, is also ours. At our core, underneath everything else we or the world has piled on, who we are is God's, is God's child, God's Beloved. What does that mean as we witness and make sense of / not just what happened on Wednesday, but everything that has come before it? What does that mean as we enter this new year and seek to be faithful and purposeful, to be salty and bright? And how can we, like Jesus, at all times and in all places be firmly anchored in and powerfully guided by who we are: Child of God, Beloved? Let's pray.

We return to the place today we were just about a month ago. Do you remember? On the 2nd week in Advent we were standing right here, in the wilderness and at the edge of the Jordan River along with everybody else, or at least "the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem". John, Jesus' cousin, was calling people to turn around, to change their minds, to repent. You know and I know that's never an easy message to deliver, never mind receive, but by all accounts, people were responding. There was an evident hunger in the people, a desire for change and transformation, a conviction that opened them up to "confess their sins", all the ways that their lives were misaligned with God's dreams. We might wonder, where are we in this scene today? Are we part of the crowd, checking things out, present due more to curiosity than conviction? Are we at the edge of the water, trying to decide whether to get in or not? Are we in the water, hearts broken open, filled with hope for life renewed?

What happened next must have stopped everyone in their tracks - wherever they were in the scene. Mark tells us that the heavens are torn apart (I hear Isaiah pleading for God to tear open the heavens, do you?), and the Spirit - the Spirit John had just ascribed to the one more powerful than he, the one still on his way - descends and rests on Jesus. Then the voice! "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." I wonder what these words meant to Jesus? I wonder what he felt in that moment? What do they mean to you? What feelings are evoked for you?

We have no way of knowing who Jesus thought he was before this moment, this profound moment of being named and claimed. We have no way of knowing if he had intended a different path for himself - the life of a carpenter, for example, of settling down with a fellow Nazarene and having a couple of babies. All we know is that once the voice spoke, once his identity as God's son and beloved are called out, it propelled him from the muddy waters of the Jordan, into the hot, dry sun of the wilderness, and from there, into the Galilean countryside brimming with hurting and needy people, and later, to a cross on a hill overlooking Jerusalem.

One could argue that it was those words and the deep sense of affirmation and identity that came with them, that enabled Jesus to live into the enormous mission in front of him, that of bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captive, recovery of sight to the blind, and liberation to the oppressed. With those words, God made clear that Jesus was seen, claimed as God's own, and named. Jesus then spends the rest of his life making clear to everyone else that very same thing: that they are seen, claimed, and named by God.

Through the act of baptism, we receive God's grace by water and by the Holy Spirit and claim the words spoken to Jesus for ourselves – We too are God's children. We too are God's Beloved. With us – with us – God is well pleased. That's who we are. And while that is a powerful identity, we should not forget what John said, "I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. While the heavens may not open up for us, the Holy Spirit surely comes and rests on us too. For it is the Holy Spirit that animates and empowers us, to propel us into life, to do what Jesus did, to follow in his way, to doggedly reveal other's Belovedness even as we claim our own. And it is the Holy Spirit that animates and empowers us to see when we are misaligned with God, and then to turn, to change, to reject any and all powers of evil, to resist injustice and oppression, in all the wily and stark forms they present themselves. Those are the words of our profession of faith that lead us to the baptismal waters.

Wednesday very much revealed who we are as a nation. It was an incredibly sad and disturbing day. But lest we're tempted to sigh, shake our heads, wash our hands of it, and then move on, let us not forget that Wednesday also presented a profound opportunity to remember, affirm, and assert who we are in God. It was a profound opportunity to glue our eyes, not to the spectacle of violence and glee, but on God, the one who breaks into our world so that we can be healed of our blindness and behold one another's glorious Belovedness. It was a profound opportunity to return to Jesus' side, the one we call the Light of the World, the one who walked a relentless path of self-giving love. So may our remembrance of Jesus' baptism and our own call us to confidence, call us to courage, call us to hope, but also, importantly, call us to action. Amen.

**PRAYERS of the PEOPLE** – *Spend time in prayer. What did you hear for yourself through today's scripture and reflection? Talk to God about it. Then lift up the joys and concerns that are in your heart. You might write them down, speak them aloud, or pray them in silence.*



*I would be honored to pray with you and for you.*

*Please send a note via text, mail, or email or give me a call if I can do so.*

**SHARING OUR GIFTS**— *How might you offer yourself and all that you have to God this week? How are you being invited to practice generosity? Spend a moment listening for God's direction.*

*You are invited to contribute financially towards the purpose and ministry of TTUMC. We are a congregation committed to being conduits of God's healing in our neighborhood and beyond, and in so doing, impact the last and the least. You can contribute by mailing in a check, dropping off cash, or giving online via PayPal (visit [www.twintowersumc.org](http://www.twintowersumc.org)). Take a moment and do that now. Please also be sure to return your Stewardship Response Card via mail or online [here](#) today!*

**CLOSING HYMN** - "Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters" UMH 605

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fPDFa8-Hjc>

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|---|---|
| 1. Wash, O God, our sons and daughters,<br>where your cleansing waters flow.<br>Number them among your people;<br>bless as Christ blessed long ago.<br>Weave them garments bright and<br>sparkling;<br>compass them with love and light<br>Fill, anoint them; send your Spirit,<br>holy dove and heart's delight. | God, renew us, guide our footsteps;<br>free from sin and all its snares,<br>one with Christ in living, dying,<br>by your Spirit, children, heirs  |
| 2. We who bring them long for nurture;<br>by your milk may we be fed.<br>Let us join your feast, partaking<br>cup of blessing, living bread.  | 3. Oh, how deep your holy wisdom!<br>Unimagined, all your ways!<br>To your name be glory, honor!<br>With our lives we worship, praise!<br>We your people stand before you,<br>water washed and Spirit born.<br>By your grace, our lives we offer.<br>Recreate us; God, transform! |

**BENEDICTION** - *\*<https://voxveniae.com/>*

May our lives be a river.

May we flow with the purpose of the One who created and called us, who directs

our courses and turns us ever toward home.

May our way shimmer with the light of Christ who goes with us, who bears us up, who calls us by name, to give life to all we meet along the way.

May we move with the grace of the Spirit who brooded over the face of the waters at the beginning and who will gather us in at the end.

Let us leave here, celebrating and serving with the love of the Creator, of the Risen Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!**

**PRAYER INVITES:**

- For the reckoning and healing needed in our country.
- For **P. Bob** is scheduled for surgery on Jan. 11th.
- For the healing and wholeness of **Gary B., Doug M., Dale P., Rose, Ruth.**