

Nativity Lutheran Church  
Palm Beach Gardens, FL  
January 7, 2018

The Baptism of Our Lord  
Text: St. Mark 1:4-11  
Theme: Can You Keep The Secret?

In Nomine Jesu

**<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."**

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Last Sunday was New Year's Eve. We're already one week into the new year. Maybe we're a week into our new year resolutions, eh? Lots of us may pooh pooh New Year's resolutions, and mutter under our breath that it's just another day—one of three hundred and sixty-five. But resolutions or not, there's a newness about this time. Last year is behind us. We look forward to the coming year, because it holds hope and promise. New stuff.

And we like new things. There may be no sweeter smell on earth than the aroma of a new car. You can slip into it, inhale deeply, and almost get carried away. Some of us are still transfixed by the new gadgets we received as gifts at Christmas. When you slip on a new blouse and skirt, or shirt and pants—I don't know why, but somehow you feel sharper. You look in the mirror and you swear that you look better in your new clothes than that frumpy outfit you just took off.

Our text today is about newness. Jesus is baptized, and he begins a new chapter in his life. There is a new dynamic to his ministry, new adventures and opportunities, and also new obstacles and opposition.

We Christians have a tendency to "clean up" Jesus' being truly human. We agree that God became human and took on our identity in the person of Jesus. But it's difficult to imagine Jesus struggling with the same issues that we struggle with every day. It's easier for us to envision Jesus leading a somewhat charmed

life. Not only can we easily accept that Jesus didn't sin, we might want to think that he wasn't even tempted. We'd figure him for straight "A's" and assume that he was valedictorian of his class. We imagine him as never disappointed or discouraged, never tempted to be envious or jealous.

But I don't think Jesus had it as easy as we might think he did. He was born into a family of meager means. He was born out of wedlock—a curse he bore throughout his life. Certainly, Mary told him about the visit by the angel, the shepherds and the magi, but that doesn't help much if you are taunted by your playmates and shunned by adults.

The fact that God spoke to Jesus at the time of his baptism and identified him as the Son of God transformed Jesus – and for sure transformed those around him. From the time of his baptism onward, Jesus defined himself as God's chosen one, God's anointed. Life was fresh and took on a new meaning.

In lots of ways our lives are similar to Jesus'. We look at ourselves in the mirror and we don't like all that we see. We tell ourselves that we are average, or worse—failures. The positive aspects of our lives can easily be overlooked when we see only the negative.

But we, too, have been baptized, and at our baptism we have taken on a new nature. We are no longer average, or failures. Rather, we are sons and daughters of God. Like Jesus, God has claimed us as his own, filled us with his Holy Spirit (his presence and power) and proclaimed that he is well pleased with us. For us as well, all things became new at our baptism.

We don't know much about Jesus before his baptism. It's easy to assume that those days weren't notable. They certainly were of no consequence to the gospel writers and the early church.

It's at his baptism that Jesus begins his mission. The Spirit descends upon him and empowers him for ministry. From this point on, Jesus is focused on proclaiming that the kingdom has come near. Even more, he demonstrates it in his healing of the sick, casting out demons, and providing for the needs of the folk he encountered ... great or small.

There are times in our lives when we wonder what we're all about. That may be especially true in times of transition. New graduates wonder what their next steps are to be. When we retire, we ask ourselves, "What's next, what are we to do, now?" Job loss causes us to question our purpose in life. Sickness shatters our lives and causes us to wonder what life is all about.

We, like Jesus, need to be reminded that we have been given a mission. It became ours at our baptism. We're the body of Christ; his eyes and ears, hands and feet. We're the people who are called to "make disciples of all nations." We have been given the privileged task of sharing God's love and grace. Whatever our situations in life are, this calling remains constant. It's our core mission, and everything else in our lives—our job, family, leisure time, etc.—becomes an expression of that mission.

By giving us a mission our baptism daily brings newness in to our lives.

Immediately after his baptism, Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. In the wilderness he was threatened by wild beasts and tempted by Satan. Jesus was also ministered to by angels.

Our baptism opens up new challenges and tests for us every day. We have new obstacles to overcome, but we have the promise that God will be with us in the person of the Holy Spirit. God will never leave us or forsake us. Our new challenges provide us with new ways to experience God's presence in our lives.

Though our baptism was likely years ago, it still it brings newness in our lives. Every morning can begin with a new celebration that we are God's people. Every day we can rejoice in our new mission and ministry. We can even give thanks for the challenges of life, because they bring with them a new experience of God's grace and love.

We have been baptized, and like Christ, all things are new!

Amen.

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Soli Deo Gloria