

08 January 2023 ~ Baptism of Jesus/Reception of Members

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that the land where we gather for worship belongs to God, as does all of creation. We also know that this is the unceded territory of the Lkwungen and WSÁNEĆ people. As we pray, reflect, and celebrate in this place, we do so as guests lamenting the injustice in our history. We ask that the God of love and justice lead us along the path of reconciliation, bringing accountability and healing. May we be inspired to forge new relationships of respect and solidarity.

➤ *For mornings bright (verses 1 and 4)*

Call to Worship

We are called to serve in the name of Jesus, God's beloved Son,

God calls us by name because we are beloved.

God calls us to be a light to the nations.

We wait for God's teaching and to learn justice.

We are witnesses to God's goodness and grace who claims and loves us.

God's name be praised!

† Gathering Prayer / The Lord's Prayer / Words of Hope

Creator God, you formed the heavens and stretched them over us – you spread out the earth and made it fruitful. From your glory, you came to us in Jesus, to touch the earth with healing and hope. We praise you for all the gifts you have given in Christ and in creation. In the strength of the Spirit, we come to renew our commitment to you – to serve in the name of Jesus, who is one with you and the Holy Spirit, now and always.

Merciful God, in baptism you promise us forgiveness and new life. We confess that we often prefer our old ways. We resist the new opportunities you set before us – clinging to harmful habits and nursing grudges – failing to forgive one another. Have mercy upon us, O God, and guide us to live with more grace and generosity through Christ our Lord who encourages us to pray together... ***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen***

Friends, hear the good news of the gospel. Before the world was made, we were chosen in Christ to be part of God's family. God calls us to new life in Christ, so trust in divine forgiveness and grace. Turn and follow Jesus in repentance and joy.

† Prayer for Understanding

Gracious God, your blessing for us and for all creation is new each day. Guide us to live as your beloved, Spirit-filled children, streaming into the world as witnesses to Christ's power and love. Amen

Scripture **Isaiah 42: 1-9** [OT 670]

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: *I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.*

Acts 10: 34-43 [NT 129]

Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Matthew 3: 13-17 [NT 3]

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness."

Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

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

Message

Epiphany is all about revealing the divine in expected and unexpected places. Today's revelation is all about water, one of the most common and taken for granted aspects of first world life. Our tap water, flowing Jordan waters, waves on Willows Beach or along Dallas Road, the water of the womb, and the waters that nourish our crops and our bodies. Yet, water can be scarce in drought-ridden Africa or devastating when it causes floods in Pakistan. Without water, our lives are in danger. We can do without food for a few days, but water is a necessity. In the wake of Christmas and the feast of Epiphany, many of us are getting back to "normal," to the ordinariness of time, but when time becomes too ordinary, we become spiritually dehydrated, thirsty for living waters which are always here but which we often neglect.

This Sunday, we celebrate the baptism of Jesus, our own baptisms, and the water that gives us life. Yet, as we remember our baptisms – or those we have witnessed and participated in – as we ponder the amazing promise of baptism, we need also to affirm God's presence in the lives of those who have not been baptized. Baptism is a sacrament, an invisible sign of a visible grace. But God's grace is manifest in a variety of ways and not just the rites of the church. Saving grace comes to us in the touch of a friend, a word of forgiveness, a loving home, and the opportunity to begin again. The waters of baptism join us with the waters of creation and the call to care for the Earth's wondrous, yet fragile, ecosystem. Baptism is not a ticket to salvation or another thing to do to earn God's grace. It is a sign of the holy – a revelation of Spirit – the divine that touches us all.

Jesus comes to the Jordan to be baptized. Although John is not eager to baptize one whom he believes to have a unique relationship with God, Jesus insists on being baptized to “fulfill all righteousness,” to be in solidarity with all who struggle to experience God in transformative ways. As Jesus rises from the Jordan, a dove descends and God’s voice is heard, *“this is my beloved with whom I am well pleased.”* While some suggest that God’s voice defines Jesus as other than us – a supernatural interruption in human history – I believe that Jesus’ baptism and God’s pronouncement is an affirmation that Jesus is part of the whole human story – that we share in God’s love just as Jesus did.

In our own unique way, we embody holiness – that God says the same word of grace to everyone who comes for baptism, and to every child who is born. We are God’s beloved, whether or not we are aware of it or even if we believe that we have fallen from grace.

One day, more than twenty years ago now (how is that even possible?), during my Clinical Pastoral Experience at a busy hospital in Edmonton I was on call and was paged to the neonatal intensive care unit. A young woman had gone into labor and delivered her baby at 26 weeks – too early. They wanted the baby baptized. I went upstairs with fear and trembling – the elevator comes quickly when you are trying to pray – *“give me the words God” – “guide me” – “allow me be of help”*. When I arrived, there was an incubator with more equipment than baby – tiny and helpless. There was a tired, bewildered, grieving young mother and her mother looking drawn and uncertain. In addition, there was the young woman’s brother and his wife. We were a crowd in the busy neonatal unit. The staff found us a quiet room – preparations were made – tears were shed.

This unlikely, ill-prepared family gathered for an unexpected baptism: Roman Catholic, Mormon, skeptic and Protestant with a not-yet-ordained-Presbyterian-minister-wannabe. They came to present an infant not fully formed, not ready to be born but born nonetheless – an infant not capable of breathing on its own – not able to sin or repent. They came with this child to be baptized.

There was none of the excitement that often accompanies baptism. There was no luncheon planned, no special gown, no Bible or candle presentation. This baby would not live to childhood or adulthood – would not survive the day – the hour. There was no anticipation of profession of faith in the future – there was no anticipation of a future at all.

I performed the sacrament and held the baby for a time. We prayed. The family talked and took photos and wept. The nurse checked vital signs. We signed the forms. The baby died – and after a time we left the quiet room.

Today, as we celebrate the baptism of Jesus and as together, we affirm our faith, I recall this among the other experiences of baptism I have had. Why did these people come for baptism? What did it mean for them? What does it mean for me – for you?

Some of the same questions arise when looking at the baptism of Jesus as told to us in the gospel of Matthew. Why does Jesus come to be baptized? What does it mean for him? What did it mean for John and the others there on the banks of the muddy Jordan River? What does it mean for you and for us?

Jesus comes out of obedience to God and in solidarity with all humanity. John has been preaching a baptism of repentance – he tells people to confess their sins and turn their lives around. For John, and those who came to follow him, baptism washed sin away and marked the beginning of new life. But Jesus is without sin – so why does he need to be baptized? It signifies the beginning of his vocation – the start of his ministry but, rather than a washing away of sin, it is for Jesus an obedient response to the call of God. In this act, Jesus enters into solidarity with all humanity. He tells John that it must happen; he must be baptized, because that is what God desires – because his baptism *fulfills all righteousness*.

Acts 10 describes the universality of grace. God's grace embraces Jew and Gentile alike. Cornelius' household receives God's grace just as do orthodox followers of Judaism. No one is excluded from divine mercy or love. These words are especially powerful these days when people seem so polarized, racially, ethnically, politically, culturally, and sexually. And it's not just about Cornelius and Peter, but about the unbroken interdependence and unity of humanity. We are all standing in the need of grace – finite, broken, dependent, and mortal. God's grace is offered regardless of whether we've been baptized – no matter our political perspective, ethnicity, or nation of origin. All are welcome to share in the waters of grace.

The little one I baptized in the hospital that day came without sin. Her family came following God's desire. They were responding to God's divine activity – recognizing the gift of belonging to the family of faith – celebrating the right relationship with God that is revealed in Jesus.

Today, the divine affirmation – ***you are my beloved*** – pertains to each and all of us. The ethic of baptism is aspirational and inclusive, inviting us to see all creation as God's beloved. Look in the mirror and proclaim to yourself and all who might listen, "*God's beloved child,*" "*God loves me,*" "*I am the light of the world,*" "*Jesus loves me, this I know... Yes, Jesus loves me*" – and Jesus loves everyone else. Let it be so.

Offering and Prayer *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

God asks us to spread the Good News that God is at work in the world and that we are loved and blessed in Jesus' name. We offer our gifts to God in thanksgiving for all this Good News.

God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, we bring our offerings to you with grateful hearts. Use these gifts to spread your love in the world. And make us a blessing to all those whom we encounter. Amen

Welcoming New Members

Christian friends, **Doug Bracken, Kathy Bracken** and **Helen Sanderson** have been baptized and are members of the body of Christ. They have been nurtured within the Christian community and instructed in the belief and practice of the church. They have been received by Knox Session into the membership of this congregation and desire to make a public profession of their faith – claiming the rights and responsibilities associated with membership in the congregation of Knox Church.

By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.

Doug, Kathy and **Helen** you stand before God and this community of faith to acknowledge your growth in grace and to assume responsibility as a disciple of Jesus Christ in this congregation and in the world.

- Do you profess your faith in God our creator – in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord – in the Holy Spirit as teacher and guide? ***I do***
- Will you faithfully participate in worship, study and prayer – entering into the life and work of the church, supporting it with your gifts and sharing in its mission in the world? ***I will***
- Will you seek to turn away from sin and evil which separates you from the love of God – pursuing always Christ's way of love and hope? ***I will***

[To the congregation] Will you guide and nurture **Doug, Kathy** and **Helen** by word and deed, with love and in prayer – encouraging them to follow the way of Christ and to be faithful members of Christ's church? ***We will***

Affirming our Baptism *Living Faith 7.6*

Baptism is a sign and seal of our union with Christ and with his church.

Through it we share in the death and resurrection of Christ and are commissioned to his service.

In Baptism, water is administered in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The water signifies the washing away of sin, the start of new life in Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

By the power of the Holy Spirit God acts through Baptism. It is the sacrament not of what we do but of what God has done for us in Christ.

God's grace and our response to it are not tied to the moment of Baptism, but continue and deepen throughout life.

It is a sacrament meant for those who profess their faith and for their children. Together we are the family of God.

Baptism is also an act of discipleship that requires commitment and looks towards growth in Christ.

Those baptized in infancy are called in later years to make personal profession of Christ.

What is born may die. What is grafted may wither. Congregations and those baptized must strive to nurture life in Christ.

Baptism assures us that we belong to God.

In life and in death our greatest comfort is that we belong to our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Blessing

Doug, Kathy and Helen may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen**

You have been received into the membership of this congregation. You join us as siblings in Christ to share in the worship and work of this faith community. Let us pray... *Holy God, we praise you for calling us to be a servant people, and for gathering us into the body of Christ. We thank you for choosing to add to our number siblings in faith. Together may*

*we live in your Spirit, and so love one another, that we may have the mind of Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom we give honour and glory forever. **Amen***

➤ ***Oh, I know the Lord's laid his hands on me*** **579**

Blessing

You are God's beloved. Go in the assurance of this love, to engage the challenges God sets before us with confidence. And may God who is the Source, Saviour and Spirit of life go with you, and give you joy and peace, now and always.

➤ ***We are marching*** *(repeat)* **636**