

Note: The sermon below will be delivered by the Rev. Caleb Kim on Sunday, March 9, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.

Title: "This is My Son, Whom I Love!"

In our Gospel reading today, the author of Matthew describes the baptism of Jesus Christ. In the wilderness of Judea, John the Baptist preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 3:2). John baptized with water those who confessed their sins and sought to live fruitful lives. He also introduced them to Jesus, who would baptize them "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11). At that time, Jesus came to the Jordan River to be baptized. John was hesitant he felt that Jesus should baptize him, not the other way around. We understand his hesitation, as baptism symbolizes the forgiveness of sins, and Jesus, being sinless, did not need this. Yet, Jesus persuaded John to baptize Him. As soon as Jesus was baptized and came up out of the water, the heavens opened, and the Spirit of God descended like a dove to bless Him. In that divine moment, God spoke to the people there: "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). In Jesus' baptism, we see that He is identified as the Son of God.

Now, consider what happens in the Kingdom of Heaven when we celebrate the sacrament of infant baptism in our worship service. Imagine a great company of our ancestors in faith gathered around the throne of the Lord God Almighty, witnessing the baptism of Adyria Martire, much like the animal kingdom in *The Lion King*. During this sacred observance, we can hear the voice of God saying, "This is my child, the beloved," delivered to Adyria, the Martire family, and all of us as a congregation.

In the Epistle to Romans, the Apostle Paul describes baptism in the following way: "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:3-4). Whether we realize it or not, when we are baptized, we are spiritually united with Jesus. Because of the fall of Adam and Eve, our spiritual ancestors, we were all born with a sinful nature, and we have all committed wrongdoings before the Lord. Due to the influence of sin inherited from our first parents, we are all destined to die and return to the ground, just as Adam and Eve did (Genesis 3:19). However, Paul also explains the new blessing brought by Jesus Christ. When we repent of our sins and put our trust in Jesus—or, in the case of infants, through the faith of our parents' observance in baptism—we not only join in His death but also participate in His resurrection. In baptism, it is believed that "our old self" is crucified with Jesus and "our new birth" begins with Christ. That is why we are required to make baptismal vows before the Lord, such as the commitment to "turn away from evil and turn to Christ."

Now, let us return to the main topic, the baptism of Christ. What is the connection between Jesus' baptism and ours? Did we hear any thundering voices from heaven or see any doves descending on us at our baptisms? Most of us did not. However, I believe that in every baptism, God says to the candidates and their families, "This is my son or my daughter, whom I love" (Matthew 3:17). Through baptism, we, as baptized believers, receive the great identity of being God's beloved children and the incredible privilege of being united with Christ. In baptism, we are encouraged to become more like

Jesus. We are also called to claim our distinction as Christ's followers and to live as the light of the world (Matthew 5:14).

Some of us may be familiar with the story of the burning bush in the Old Testament. When Moses encountered the Lord on the mountain, he asked God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11). This "Who am I" statement reflects Moses' insecurity. He had once been a prince of Egypt, but when he came to realize his true identity as an Israelite, he gave up that position and chose to try to rescue his people who were enslaved in Egypt. However, during his time in the wilderness, Moses became discouraged and lost his sense of purpose. He saw himself only as a shepherd of sheep, not as the leader of Israel. At that moment, God reminded Moses of his identity as the leader of His people with these words of promise: "I will be with you... Do not be afraid. Stand firm, and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today... The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still" (Exodus 3:12, 4:13-14). This is a beautiful reminder of God's encouragement not only for Moses but also for all of us who may feel discouraged or overwhelmed by the challenges we face today. God's presence and His promises reminds us of our identity as His children, knowing that He will fight for us.

Have we ever forgotten our spiritual distinctiveness? Today is the time to remember again who we are in God! The Apostle Paul echoes our sacred uniqueness in Ephesians 2:10, where he says, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). What a wonderful statement! We are all God's masterpieces! Sometimes we tend to value ourselves based on what we have accomplished. But do you know how paintings are valued? ...In many cases, painting are valued based on the artist who created them. According to the Psalmist, humans are the number one of God's creation (Psalm 8). When we truly understand this, our human conditions will no longer define us. God has made us amazing and beautiful with His unique characteristics. We are worth so much more than we realize because we are the creation of the Wonderful Painter, the Magnificent God.

Before I conclude this sermon, I want us to ask ourselves: Do we speak, think, and act like children of the Lion King? We might have mixed answers. Sometimes we live according to what the Word of God teaches us, and other times, we struggle to live out those teachings. One of the main reasons we face this challenge is the spiritual battle we are in. One crucial way our enemy, Satan, attacks us is by deceiving about our true identity in Christ. He tempts us to focus more on what other people say about us rather than on how God values us.

Friends, today is also a time to remember anew the message God has given us His people, particularly through our baptism: "This is my son or daughter, whom I love; with him or her I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). We are priceless in God's eyes. Consider Jesus, depicted as the Lion and the King of kings (Revelation 5:5, 19:16), and who we are in Christ. We are children of the Lion King, Jesus Christ. We are all called to be more like little Jesuses in His Kingdom. Once again, let us remember our true identity in God, who we are, and to whom we belong. Let us commit ourselves to living for His glory in our daily lives and making a difference in this beautiful God-given world.

**In this sermon, I have drawn some thoughts from various messages founded in Matthew 3:1-17.*