Revealing God – the Baptism of Jesus

Matthew 3:13-17 Kimby Young

John 1:29-42 January 12, 2024

The season of Epiphany, where we find ourselves now, is about the revelation of God to the world through Jesus Christ. It is about seeing God and understanding God more completely. The first story of Epiphany is the one we looked at last week with the visit of the wise men to baby Jesus. The second story of Epiphany is always the baptism of Jesus Christ by John the Baptist. We also on this day look at our own baptisms and the meaning of this gift of God. We are all of God’s beloved children – blessed by God and called by God.

In the story of Jesus’ baptism by John truth about God is revealed. The clouds open up and a dove descends from heaven, a voice speaks so that the crowd could see and hear. Jesus already knew who Jesus was, who God is. So the point of all this theatrical revelation, is for the crowd watching, for the disciples who would follow, for all of us who would follow down through the ages. The point of the drama of the baptism of Jesus is to show us something – to reveal something about God. What does the Baptism of Jesus tell us about who God is? I would suggest today – at least three things. First that God loves. Second that God gives. And third that God has a plan.

The first of these – the love of God – is actually spelled out during the baptism as recorded in the scripture from Matthew – and corresponding passages of every gospel. God says, “This is my beloved son.” This is the One I love and with whom I am well pleased. Proof – as if we needed it – that God loves. I say as if we needed it because over and over again in scripture there is proof of God’s love. Over and over again in our lives, there is proof of God’s love. God is love. And Jesus is the personification of that love. God so loved the world that God gave his son Jesus – that Jesus came into the world – to save the world, to do everything possible to love us completely. God loves. And everything Jesus did throughout his life on Earth points toward that love, reminds us of that love, and calls us into that love – even up to and including Jesus death on the cross.

I would extend the scripture for today – where God says – Jesus is my beloved – to say that God also calls us beloved. We believe that when we are baptized, as Jesus was baptized, we are joined with Jesus for eternity. We are adopted by God – symbolized in our baptism. We belong to God - we become children of God – sisters and brothers of Jesus Christ. We believe it. Whenever someone is baptized in our tradition we say, “See what love the Father has for us that we should be called children of God – and so we are.” We are beloved children of God. God loves us. God wants the best for us. God provides for us. God guides us. Just like any good parent. God loves each and every one of us.

That leads to my second point about what the baptism of Jesus tells us about God. It reminds us that God gives. Specifically in the Matthew passage the description of the Holy Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and in the John passage for today, John’s description of Jesus as the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit – meaning pour the Holy Spirit out over all who choose to believe. God gives the Holy Spirit. Throughout the Bible the Holy Spirit is the presence of God. Throughout the New Testament and the life of the church, the Holy Spirit brings spiritual gifts – power from God, given by God to all who believe. After Jesus resurrection and ascension, we remember the coming of the Holy Spirit to the first disciples on Pentecost – with tongues of fire, and mighty winds, and gifts poured out in abundance – speaking in tongues, healing, preaching, prophecy, teaching, hospitality, kindness, generosity – and other gifts too many to name or count. God gives gifts freely and abundantly to all who will receive.

Here at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry – the first action Jesus takes – is to demonstrate God’s generosity, and to publicly invite everyone into that generosity of God. Jesus says to John’s disciples and to us. “Come and See.” Come, see God. Come be a part of the abundance God offers. Come receive the gifts of God. Come, find out what God is all about and receive all that God has to offer. You will be blessed.

That leads to the third revelation about God which we can learn from the baptism of Jesus. It reveals that God has a plan for our salvation. In the reading from John, when John the Baptist explains why he baptized Jesus and who he knows Jesus is – John calls Jesus the “lamb of God.” You probably know that in the Old Testament, in the old covenant, in the rituals of the temple in Jerusalem, animal sacrifice was a common thing. An offering of a lamb was considered pure and most acceptable. A person might make a sacrifice in order to praise God, to thank God for some specific blessing, to ask God for a particular gift or need, or to ask forgiveness for some sin or wrong doing. If a person had sinned, their relationship with God was broken and could only be restored by such a sacrifice. We believe Jesus Christ made that sacrifice for us in his death on the cross. Jesus became the lamb of God – from God and for God – the lamb of sacrifice for all of us. Through that sacrifice Jesus restored our relationship to God for all time. And because of that sacrifice of Jesus, we no longer have to make any such sacrifice – God welcomes us with grace, forgives us when we ask, and restores us to relationship. Because of that action of Jesus Christ, we belong to God.

The sacrament of Baptism is about that belonging. It is about unity with Christ, complete connection to God. In baptism, we believe that every barrier to being with God is washed away. No more sin. No more sorrow. No more separation. Only life with God in all its blessing and all its belonging. We don’t have to do anything to receive that life in Christ. In fact we can’t “do” anything to earn that grace. It is a free gift of God, because of God’s love. We believe that in baptism we are so connected to Christ, so united with Jesus - that we die like Jesus did. Symbolically we drown in the waters of baptism. Sin is dead. Separation is dead. Death is dead. We no longer belong to this world. We belong to God. And we believe, because of that unity and that grace of God, we are raised to new life in Jesus Christ in his resurrection. We are born again. We are resurrected to live with God for all eternity – as Christ lives with God eternally. And that new life with God – begins here and now. Has already begun because of God’s love in Jesus Christ.

You are loved by God. You are gifted by God. You belong to God. God’s plan for us includes sharing that love, using those gifts for the good of others, and extending that belonging to everyone – welcoming everyone in the name of Jesus Christ.

Every year at this time, we remember the baptism of Jesus, and we are reminded of our own baptisms. This day falls at the beginning of each new year to remind us again of God’s promises fulfilled and of God’s call to renewal and life. You may have been baptized as a child. You may have been baptized as an adult. You may not have been baptized at all. And if you want to be baptized, just let me know – we will make it happen.

Whenever you are baptized, that is not the end of the journey. Like Jesus, it was only the beginning of Christ’s ministry on earth. Baptism is a call to step into God’s plan of life, to share your gifts, to love others, and to know with absolute certainty that you belong to God who loves you and is well pleased in the life you live by the grace of Jesus Christ. Come, be a part of God’s plan. Come and receive God’s gifts. Come and See what love God has for you. Come, Beloved Child, come and see God.

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Matthew 3:13-17

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 God’s Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from the heavens said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

John 1:29-42

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Chosen One.”

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God