Baptism of the Lord - 2025

St. Alfred’s, Palm Harbor

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## opening

We are gathered here this morning for a variety of reasons. In some places there might be children in church because their parents told them, “You will be in church.” Others are here because it’s what they do every Sunday. Some places I think there’s still a social expectation that a person will be in church. Some people, no doubt, don’t really know why they’re in church.

Now some of you may be aware that after the Christmas festivities, there is often a drop off in attendance. So you all are no doubt here because you have chosen to be.

For myself, there is the fact that Fr. Peter had sent me a list of who would celebrate and preach through February and March. This was one of my Sundays and I make a concerted effort to do what I said I would do.

In the early centuries of the church on the day known as **theophany** – or more recently **epiphany** – in the eastern orthodox tradition, people would be in church because it was one of the most important festival days of the year, much more important than Christmas, for example.

One of us this weekend is in church because he wants to be baptized.

## Certificates

A bishop once did a show and tell on the meaning and importance of **baptism**. He had a way of explaining theological truths in ways that I could accept for my own.

First he held up a certificate of ordination. See it’s ornate frame, its size, the calligraphy which is real hand writing …

Then he held up a baptismal certificate.

Most of them that I’m aware of are much smaller than this one. They’re not usually framed. Most likely most of you have no idea where your baptismal certificate is.

But, as Bp. Ray said, we have the importance of these certificates **backwards.** It is the baptism that is far and away the most important. Ordination has one main purpose and that is to serve the community of the **baptized**.

## Epiphany (and Christmas)

### Baptism

We associate Christmas with an infant. The “baby Jesus.” And we have associated baptism with infants.

But Christmas is in fact not about babies, but about a **cosmic event.**

**Epiphany** has been kept tidy in a box for centuries as being the celebration of the visit of the three wisemen to the baby Jesus. It fills out the creché and makes it complete. Here, towards the end of my many years of ministry, my most glorious memories are of the adults I have accompanied into and through baptism.

Baptism is not about infants. It is about the fullness of what a human being really is. **The Glory of God.**

Jesus was born a human being, humble as that is, and he became known, he was manifest to the world, as the **Messiah** and **Son of God**.

The season of Epiphany begins with the account of Jesus’ **baptism** by John. The way had been prepared by the prophets – John being the latest example. And it was at that moment that God Himself announced to the world the relationship between Jesus and Abba, Father.

This is my beloved son!

And so it is that we can see Jesus’ baptism as the beginning of his ministry, the beginning of his living out who he truly was.

The church has always intended us to see our own lives as a reflection of Jesus’ life. The church has always intended us to live our lives into the fullness of what Christ did in the first place for us.

The church has always called us to recognize that we are children of God through adoption by the power of the Holy Spirit in Jesus.

We are meant to see the meaning of our own lives through the lens of Jesus’ baptism. Our own lives are given meaning as we recognize more and more an identification with Jesus’ baptism.

The beginning of my own journey as an adult Christian is wrapped up with trying to make sense out of **baptism.**

## My own journey into my baptism

When I was a teenager I gave very little thought to baptism. I went to church every Sunday, along with my mother and my siblings. I don’t think, however, that I saw very many baptisms because in those days baptisms were done outside of the Sunday service. Baptism was a private affair and indeed, I think, regarded primarily as a transaction between God and the infant. It was general practice in the Episcopal church that children were baptized not long after birth or at least when family could be gathered together.

I’m pretty sure that no one set out to instruct me about what baptism was all about so what I knew and thought about it I picked up from general information, and particularly what was stressed at the time of my own confirmation.

Somewhere I absorbed the notion that baptism was something that repaired original sin and thus assured that the infant was eligible for heaven. It was somehow about heaven and hell – but I didn’t have a clue about what I really believed or understood about those concepts.

I spent several years overcoming that mistaken understanding.

### Bump into baptism

Baptism is not an end but the beginning of a journey.

In the 90’s, I regularly met with a provincial task force on small church ministry. We generally met at a retreat center on the west side of Chicago. It was a comfortable place to gather, but it was the chapel that was special to me. One day I was having coffee with the designer / architect of the chapel. I told him how much I loved the font he had designed. It was a small chapel and rather simply laid out. But just inside the entrance there was a flowing fountain into a 5 foot pool of water. One couldn’t walk through the doors and straight up to the altar. You had to step around the font.

My memory is that the font was made of green tiles. The water flowed from the top basin down into the pool. You could easily put your hand down into the water – make the sign of the cross.

The architect told me he wanted people to **bump into their baptism** the moment they entered his chapel.

I immediately latched onto that phrase and thought “How perfect.”

Once my life reaches its end, my hope is that I will have not just bumped into it, but I will have lived into the **fullness** of it.

### Jesus baptism marks the beginning of his ministry

Jesus’ baptism by John is at the beginning of all the gospels. The gospels are not reporting to us biographical data about Jesus. They are preaching to us the good news of God’s work in the life of God’s people.

They are **good news** for people who need good news.

**They are not biographies**, they are **proclamations**, intended to create followers of the Risen Lord – otherwise known in later years as Christians

They all place this baptism at the beginning of the Good News

As a great bible story-teller once put it, while telling the story of the whole Bible – “The Bible begins like all good stories begin, with ‘Once upon a time…’”

So with the Gospels and their Good News, they begin the way the gospel has to begin – with Jesus’ baptism by John. The evidence from the gospels demonstrates that the early church Gospel story-tellers were in fact **scandalized** by this part of the story – the part about Jesus being baptized by John at the beginning of his ministry.

Imagine: at the very beginning, from the very beginning, the Gospel has caused a scandal.

The scandal in the case of the baptism is that Jesus – whom John himself said he had come to prepare the way for – he was but a servant to the one who was to come after – that it was John who baptized Jesus. The lesser, as it were, baptizing the greater.

I tell you this … I tell you these stories in order to make this point about baptism .

Baptism is about a journey, the journey of living the life of a Christian.

Baptism is about growing into a deeper understanding, day by day, year-by-year as to what it means to be the body of Christ in the world of the living.

## You are my beloved

It is about slowly shedding the skin of what society expects of us.It is abut taking on the clothes of one **beloved of God.**

Frederich Buechner once wrote of the grace of baptism:

A crazy, holy grace I have called it. Crazy because whoever could have predicted it? Who can ever foresee the crazy how and when and where of a grace that wells up out of the lostness and pain of the world and of our own inner worlds?[[1]](#footnote-27)

Baptism is a guide to becoming an adult and it is the measure of our life long journey. Baptism is a pilgrimage in which we fall many times, but Grace lifts us back up.

Baptism makes one a part of the Body of Christ, irrevocably, whether we acknowledge it or not, whether we ignore it for years at a time, Abba is with us.

Baptism provides the assurance that we are justified in putting our trust into the hands of the only one worthy of it – Abba, Father.

**Prayer of Abandonment**

Father, I put myself in your hands; Father I abandon myself to you, I entrust myself to you. Father do with me as it pleases you. Whatever you do with me, I will thank you for it. Giving thanks for anything, I am ready for anything, I accept anything, give thanks for anything.

— Blessed Charles de Foucauld

One person in our community gave me just in the last week my latest insight into baptism. This person observed that the word **beloved** is often heard as an adjective. One is beloved or … well, something else. But the word might also be understood as a verb – an imperative verb at that – “be - loved.”

Become who you really are.

### Come to the edge

We are made in Christ not to walk about, but to fly. **Living into our baptism**, like Jesus living into his, means living heroic lives. The calling requires extraordinary lives of **blessing, forgiveness, service, prayer**.

“Come to the edge,“ he said.  
”We can’t, we’re afraid!“ they responded.  
”Come to the edge,“ he said.  
”We can’t, We will fall!“ they responded.  
”Come to the edge,” he said.  
And so they came.  
And he pushed them.  
And they flew.”

― Guillaume Apollinaire

1. From Buechner ~ originally published in *The Sacred Journey* and *Listening to Your Life* [↑](#footnote-ref-27)