

The Baptism of Jesus/The 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany. January 13, 2019.  
St. Augustine's in-the-Woods Episcopal Church, Freeland WA. Nigel Taber-Hamilton  
Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

The baptism of Jesus! Logical timing, I suppose to celebrate Jesus' baptism – logical in terms of its proximity to Christmas, and in terms of what it meant and means. Logical because this event we hear about today has to do with the orderly unfolding of the story of Jesus and God and the Spirit.

For us, listening in, the progression is first a birth, then a baptism. The fact that the story of Jesus' baptism took place decades later when he was an adult isn't important. After all, if it was centrally relevant – controlling of the religious ceremony – then no Christian would be baptized until they'd at least reached the age of about 30!

Today, we have a baptism. What could be a more joyful moment for us as Christians than the baptism of a new Christian? In the early Church, Christians went up to the newly baptized and asked them for a blessing – why? Because, in the words of one person, they were (and, each time someone is baptized today, are) “freshly minted icons of Christ” - think about that for a moment: “freshly minted icons of Christ! That's a powerful phrase! More powerful, in fact, because it's also the proverbial “two-edged sword” – If the baby to be baptized today– Dylan – is about to become a “freshly-minted Icon of Christ” then it means both that each of us was one once a “freshly minted icon of Christ,” and also that the only difference in our case is in the dropping of the “freshly minted” part – we all, you and me, remain icons of Christ, and that carries with it some significant responsibilities about the way we live – and continue to live – our lives.

Today's readings subtly point that out. “When Luke mentions that “the people were filled with expectation.....asking in their hearts” about the Baptist's identity, its obvious that they were hoping that someone was coming who would change their world. Human history is littered with attitudes like that: “ yes, I want the world to be different,” and “could it be him, or her? Are they “The One” who's going to change it?” Why do we always think that someone else is going to do the heavy lifting? John's message – about being baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire – is saying “God will give you the gift, and part of that is the energizing gift to help bring that change about. We don't get imbued with energy – “fire” – for no reason, after all!

“Be who you can be,” John says; “be who you *should* be!” Baptism isn't a passive acceptance of a passive identity; it's an active acceptance of an active identity. In remembering our own baptisms, and celebrating that of a newcomer to our faith, we're reconfirming our commitment to make this world a better place, along the lines described by Jesus, and Paul, and, well, the bible as a whole! And not just “us” as individuals; “us” as a community called the Body of Christ. Not, like the Body of Christ; actually THE Body of Christ. That's a mystical thing we miss so often that's also so important! That truth is a big reason to be joyful today! We're not alone! We don't have to do this alone! We've got each other.

Today also offers us more reasons to be joyful. The baptism of a child is an expression of hope and promise.

The 'hope' part is certainly in [the parents'] Andrea and Kenny's future vision, a hope along the lines of "we hope Dylan follows up on this commitment we're making for him!" – what parent wouldn't wish for that?!

And There's a broader hope here – one that's for all of us beyond the individual and personal; it's the Christian hope, predicated on the gifts of God's Spirit, laid on every generation of Christians – including us – at baptism.

This hope is in the blessings that come through the gift and promise of a loving, supportive community of like-minded people, blessed by God, committed to working for the common good; people looking for companions to make that journey together; people who want to celebrate – "family" in the best sense and the best experience of that word.

Being this sort of family is a remarkable thing; it promises us the possibility that together we can change the world for good.

And, in the end, this hope is invested in what we all recognize as The Gift of The Companion – Jesus – who said that "I will be with you always, to the end of time."

That's lots of positive things to hope for! Joy and hope; gift and blessing; grace upon grace!

Let's go and celebrate hope, and that joy, and that gift and blessing and grace right now, around the font.