



The First Sunday after the Epiphany (A)
The Baptism of the Lord
January 8, 2023
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

†O God, who by the illumination of your love for us through the light of Christ, shine in our hearts, so that we may see you and follow you more dearly today and every day. Amen.

This morning, I wanted to begin with a poem entitled BC AD (U. A. Fanthrope, born in 1929). Let us transport back in time to the manger whatever that looked like. Perhaps, these words can provide an intriguing context for us, as we combine elements of Christmas, Epiphany and the Baptism of Christ in today's liturgy:

"This was the moment when Before
Turned into After, and the future's
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms.

This was the moment when nothing
Happened. Only dull peace
Sprawled boringly over the earth.

This was the moment when even energetic Romans
Could find nothing better to do
Than counting heads in remote provinces.

And this was the moment
When a few farm workers and three
Members of an obscure Persian sect
Walked haphazard by starlight straight
Into the kingdom of heaven."

I hope and pray that your Christmas and New Year's Celebrations were a foretaste of the "kingdom of heaven" for you and those whom you love. That said, I'm conscious of those among us for whom such holy days or holidays are not celebrations.

Last week, the Holy Name of Jesus was celebrated in our liturgical calendar. In her homily, Deacon Jan reminded us that it was on the eighth day following Christ's birth that Jesus was circumcised. That day was also naming day, as was the Jewish Tradition into which Jesus was born. His name was writ large into the cosmos and also into our hearts. It is in Jesus that we can know God's abundant love for us and God's abiding presence deep within us.

In Jesus, we *can* know God and through him are called to tend one another just as the shepherds tended their “flocks by night.” We are reminded that the shepherds left their flocks to go pay homage to the one born in a manger.

We are minded that it was the wise who journeyed to go and see that which was manifested by a great light. We are minded that we, too, are to come, see and then go forth into the world as people manifesting the light of Christ within us. We are to tend those in need, the sick, the lonely, those suffering from grief or violence and all those in need.

Today, we remember the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. We will baptize little ones into the fellowship of God’s love for us in the Christian Tradition. We will seal them as Christ’s own forever. What does that mean?

For them at such tender ages, it doesn’t yet mean much of anything, but for their parents, grandparents and/or God Parents, it should mean a great deal. They and we commit to a promise that the newly baptized in Jesus are to be faithful to living as Jesus lived among us.

Today, we also acknowledge the light of Christ manifested to all the world, a light which shines brightly in us and a light which enables us to move beyond the dark places in our lives into the light of God’s presence through Jesus. That light is so very much needed in our lives and in the lives of all those around us.

The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan was a manifestation of God’s light through water, a dove and the voice of God declaring Jesus as the beloved of God. So, what might all this that mean to you and to me as we have embarked on another year in our life’s journey?

Perhaps for 2023, some of us have made a resolution or two for the year. Our gyms are teeming with well-meaning individuals desiring to be in better shape. Dietary companies are no doubt busy filling orders throughout the country. Well-meaning resolutions seem very appropriate at the start of a new year.

Whenever we begin something new, do we not have great expectations for what is to come? Do we not have ‘high hopes’ and a longing for something rewarding for our efforts? In our spiritual lives, do we not long for a kind of fulfillment that we realize the world cannot give?

The Gospel appointed for the Baptism of Jesus tells us that it is in Jesus that we can find the fulfillment of God’s love manifest in a particular way, truth and life. Jesus came into the world to show us a path of life, a new way of living, a new way of self-consciousness and reflection. Are we not searching for a determined way to be people of love, justice and mercy, words easily tossed about but often difficult to achieve? Are we not searching calm and peace amidst the storms of life which seem in abundant supply when standing before the creche?

On this the First Sunday after the Epiphany, January 6, we celebrate the light of Christ not just in the manger and not just in the star, the great light above Bethlehem. We celebrate the illumination

and manifestation of Jesus as the beloved Son of God. Through and in him, we can know God's desire for us as God's beloved creatures.

For Christians baptized into a fellowship of believers, we are not only called but challenged to live as Jesus lived. We can know how Jesus lived and how he valued and honored every human person. We can know how to form and shape our lives through the Holy Scriptures, the Eucharist we share at worship and in the experience of community in this "House of Prayer for All People."

Perhaps, we are here today because God is inviting us to be here as often as possible during this year. Perhaps, God is inviting you to consider giving back this year by volunteering for one or more of the many ministries to serve God through St. Mark's. We are much in need of parishioners to giving of themselves to be with us in our life together at St. Mark's.

When we conclude 2023 if we have been faithful to prayer, God's Word, Eucharist and one another, perhaps we might look back on 2023 and smile. Just maybe, we might hear God's voice, "Well done, good and faithful one, my beloved in whom I am indeed pleased." Amen.