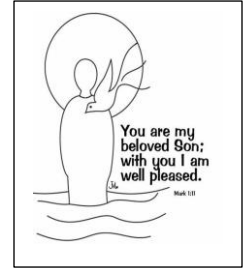


First Presbyterian Church and Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Sunday, January 10, 2021
Baptism of Our Lord



Hymn

On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry

Robert Stevens

Welcome

Call to Worship

We gather together today in the name of the Father, and of the Son+, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God;

The holy habitation of the Most High.

The Lord pours forth rivers from bare mountains, and fountains in valleys' depths.

God opens rocks, and water gushes out.

On dry thirsty land God springs forth streams in the desert.

Call to Confession

Even as we enter into the presence of God, we exclaim with Isaiah: "Woe is me, I am a person of unclean ways, dwelling among a tainted people." If we claim we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sin, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sin and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Trusting in the steadfast love of God in Christ Jesus the Lord, let us confess our sin.

Prayer of Confession (please join in confessing our sins)

Sovereign God,

In baptism You called us to turn from sin and to turn to Jesus Christ; but we stray from His ways and do not heed Your call.

In baptism You joined us to Christ in His death that we might be raised with Christ in new life; but we cherish old ways and fail to embrace the risen life of righteousness, justice, and love.

In baptism You united us with all the baptized who confess Your name; but we foster division in the church. We refuse to live as one people, and so fail to witness to Your reconciling love before the world.

In baptism You call us to ministry in all realms of life, but we refuse the struggle to know Your will; we do not nurture the ways of peace; we allow enmity to grow among us, setting neighbor against neighbor and nation against nation. We abuse the earth You entrust to our care, and live in discord with all You have made.

In baptism You sent us to serve with compassion all for whom Christ died; but we ignore the suffering of the oppressed and the plight of the poor. We take bread from the hungry, and stop our ears to cries for justice.

In baptism You gave us the Holy Spirit to teach and guide us but we rely on ourselves and refuse to trust Your direction. We spurn Your eternal wisdom, preferring, instead, the luring ways of the world.

Remember the promises You made to us in baptism, forgive our sinful ways, and heal our brokenness. Set us free from all that enslaves us, and raise us to new life in Jesus Christ, that we may be Your faithful servants, showing forth Your healing love to the world, to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

Silent and Individual Prayers of Confession

Words of Assurance

Hear the good news: Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ lives in power for us, Christ prays for us. Anyone who is in Christ is of the New Creation. The old life is finished, gone. Behold, new life has begun. Brothers and Sisters, believe the good news: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Guided by Christ made known to the nations, let us offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all people in need. *A brief silence.*

We pray for the church throughout the world and its leaders, that guided by the Holy Spirit they proclaim the forgiveness of sins.

We pray for wilderness and water, wind and wild beasts, and all living things on earth, that God's goodness is revealed through creation and faithful stewards care for all God has made.

We pray for the nations of the world and their leaders, for laborers busy both day and night, and for peacemakers amid strife, that God inspire all people to use their strength wisely.

We pray for the sick and those who provide medical care, for the imprisoned and those who show them mercy, for the lonely and those who provide companionship, for all who suffer, especially those we name in our hearts, our minds, and with our voices at this time...(please name your prayer concerns).

We pray for the congregation members gathered in their homes, for students returning to school, for those seeking renewal in their daily work, that all the beloved of God experience grace and peace.

We pray in thanksgiving for the faithful departed who now rest from their labors, that their witness inspires us in our baptismal vocations.

Merciful God, hear the prayers of Your people, spoken or silent, for the sake of the one who dwells among us, your Son, Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

Our Lord's Prayer

I invite you to join in praying the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen

Prayer for Illumination

Creator Spirit, who hovered over the waters at creation's birth, who descended in the form of a dove at Jesus' baptism, who was poured out under the signs of fire and wind at Pentecost: Come to us, open our hearts and minds, so that we may hear the Word of life and be renewed by Your power, for You live and reign with God and Christ now and forevermore. **Amen.**

Readings and Psalm

- **Genesis 1:1-5** *God creates light*
- **Psalm 29** *The voice of the LORD is upon the waters. (Ps. 29:3)*
- **Acts 19:1-7** *Baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*

The Holy Gospel according to Mark 1:4-11:

Mark's gospel reports the story of Jesus' baptism with some irony: the one on whom the Spirit descends is Himself the one who will baptize others with the Holy Spirit.

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as He was coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on Him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with You I am well pleased."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

A New Year. A New Beginning. Actually, we are already ten days into this new year.

I didn't make any dramatic New Year's Resolutions this year. I've made plenty of resolutions in past years only to realize after a couple of months – or even weeks - that they're just too darn hard to keep! I eventually just give up. Sound familiar? Have you had that experience as well?

This year, I'm just winging it. I have things I want to get accomplished and I'm going to make a more concerted effort to do them. I'm just not going to call them resolutions!

One of the things I have decided to do is downsize. I still have several years before I'm planning to retire, but there is no time like the present to start going through things. I'm sure I've mentioned this before, but I *still* have containers packed in the parsonage garage and basement that I haven't opened since I moved to the area four and a half years ago! If the items have been packed away for *that* long and I haven't used them, I probably don't need to keep them anymore. Sure, I make exceptions. You know, those family mementoes that the next family member in line will inherit when you're no longer on this earth. Those serving dishes you use *maybe* once or twice a year for special occasions. Or those clothes you might fit into in a year or so. Or longer. The latter - not keeping them around anymore!

One of the areas I started clearing out is paperwork. Boxes and boxes of paperwork. I save receipts for every little thing! My reasoning is that you never know when you might need that receipt for something!

Recently I began going through some of my late-husband's paperwork. Files and files, boxes and boxes, of paperwork. My first husband, Stephe, was a pastor and we collected a lot of articles and paperwork relating to ministry. And receipts. Stephe walked on in 2008, twelve years ago. It is past time to clean out the files and downsize. Though I have to admit it's a pretty emotional task.

I recently came across an article that Stephe wrote and had published in a Wisconsin newspaper on January 8, 1999. Just about 21 years ago. I'll share with you today.

Stephe titled the article, "Try to see the potential ahead in this new year." The article reads,

"As we begin a new year, we all reflect back over the year now past, the *years* now past. And we are filled with memories, some of which are very good, some of which are not so good, and a myriad of memories that fall somewhere in between.

Each season, or holiday, or special day for us, has at least one memory that is still most vivid, no matter how long ago the memory was imprinted on our subconscious. At this time of year, one stands out boldly in my thoughts. One that carried some degree of disappointment: sufficient to make a memory vivid.

As a child, Dec. 31 and Jan. 1 were the same, for all intents and purposes. I would go to bed on New Year's Eve, expecting to wake up New Year's Day and find "all things new." That never occurred however. Other than the Rose Parade and a day filled with Bowl games, there was usually no change at all. When I was little, I attributed this to my age; I was just too young to see the difference. And I figured, once I got older, I'd see all the wonderful changes that had occurred over the hours of sleep. Maturity, however, confirmed my earlier observations. Jan. 1 was the same as Dec. 31, in most aspects. Life does not, never has, never will follow a calendar. Most certainly there will always be businesses who close their books out on the 31st, beginning new ledger sheets Jan. 1. But for the most part, life flows onward. Most of us, find changes occurring for us as much in April or September, as we do on Jan. 1."

Stephe's article continued, "This came home to me most dramatically when I was about 9. For the first time, I was permitted to stay up with the adults to see the new year in. I watched the minutes tick away on the clock. Midnight came; then 12:01. No magical transformation. Had I not been watching the clock the moment would have passed unnoticed. Talk about disappointing! That incident did set a path of realization that has shaped, as it does most people, the thinking for years to come. Change does occur, but usually not in an instant; rather it is gradual. Of course, there are dramatic moments that change our lives, all lives, in a moment. But much of life occurs over time and we see little difference in one moment to another.

And from this comes the awareness that life is, in fact, a book being written, a novel unfolding in three main chapters; the past, the here-and-now and the writing in-progress.

Chapter one is already written, even as we open the book. And though good to peruse occasionally, it is a chapter not to be lived in. Like all of social history, we need to see from where we came, but to dwell there is destructive.

Chapter Two is being written day by day, and not just “written down” but lived. But once written, this chapter becomes tied to Chapter One. But if lived well, and experienced completely, then it is a full chapter, even as the “ink” of the experience dries on the page. This is, in and of itself, a vital chapter in the development of the novel.

Chapter Three remains unseen, yet not totally unwritten, in a potential sense. The words are not committed to paper, but they are in the Author’s Mind. For this chapter is stored up for future reference in the “yet-to-be” and the Author of Life, God alone, holds the key. That Writer’s prerogative is a bit scary! And yet, comforting on the same hand. Though the text is not before us, we recognize that the plot is unfolding as it should; for the Author knows full scenario. This chapter is the one most full of potential in faith; Chapter One is over and we can put it aside. Chapter Two allows us to do our best and labor well as we go. But Chapter Three must be faced with no assurance except that we are not alone; that the Author who KNOWS, is right there with us, as the plot unfolds.

Moment to moment may pass unnoticed, but the book is being written continually.”

I’ll interject with a few comments before concluding Stephe’s article.

I found this article quite interesting to share with you on this Sunday that we celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord, a new beginning for Christ just as we experienced a new beginning in our baptism.

We hear of a new beginning in our First Reading for today from Genesis 1:1-5, which says this, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.”

And in our gospel reading from Mark 1 that I shared with you today, we hear of a new beginning through John’s words, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. I have baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus then came and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And also, as I just shared a few moments ago, as Jesus “was coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on Him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with You I am well pleased.’”

Jesus received this new beginning, the gift of the Holy Spirit through His baptism. We receive this new beginning through our Christian baptism. We are claimed by God and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when the water is poured on our head with these words, “*Child of God*, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son+, and of the Holy Spirit.”

This same Holy Spirit is prayed upon us with thanksgiving and praise, “God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we give You thanks for freeing Your sons and daughters from the power of sin, and for raising them up to a new life through this holy sacrament. Pour Your Holy Spirit upon *this Child of Yours*: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in Your presence.”

And then our forehead receives the symbol of Christ with these words, “You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ+ forever.”

This is our new beginning. Our new life in Christ Jesus. And yet, a portion of all of our life’s chapters.

Though Chapter One has already been written, it is through God’s creation that we were made.

As we live Chapter Two, we receive grace upon grace on our journey of faith in this life.

And, as we await Chapter Three, we do so believing the words from Paul as found in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

In Daniel Erlander’s book, *Baptized, We Live*, he states, “In the baptismal water we died with Christ. We were crucified and buried in order that we might be raised with Christ to live the *new* life, to dwell in a *new* reality, a *new* order of existence.” The old is gone. The new has begun. In this world and the next.

Stephe’s article for the Wisconsin newspaper back on January 8, 1999, concluded with these words:

“May the new year be full of revelations and truths, insights and joys; and may each moment hold wonder. Like a child watching a clock on New Year’s Eve, may we each see new potential ahead, and not disappointment that nothing changes, seemingly! May 1999 for each person (the year 2021 for us), be the Year of our Lord; a Chapter Three filled with the unfolding revelation of God’s Presence. Keep the wonder of the child, who waits for a miracle; a great change! 1999 may hold many!”

1999 did, in fact, hold many changes for Stephe. Seven months and ten days later, Stephe suffered a double brain-stem stroke. As debilitating as it could have been, and was, in some regards, Stephe was able to continue preaching in his church for several more years to come. He experienced many new beginnings during those years, including marrying me.

And now, may *your new beginning* be surrounded by the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guarding your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

Moment of Reflection

Ponder, for a moment, how the words shared today reflect upon your life.

Hymn

Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound

Robert Stevens

Offering

It is generally at this time during the service that worshipers are invited to share their gifts for the Mission and Ministry of the church. Whether you choose to pause at this time or make your contribution following this service, we encourage you to continue your support of the ministry.

Prayer of Dedication *(please join in prayer)*

O Lord, we give You thanks with all we are for all You have done for us. In Your divinity You have come to dwell with us in the muddy waters of humanity, and comingled Your glory with our sin so that the ribbon of corrupting time is becoming a sparkling River of Life flowing through our days. Take all we are, Lord, and use it for Your purpose. Bless the gifts we give this day that the church might stand as shining witnesses to Your glory, planted by Your living water to bring healing to all peoples. Use us as You will to the praise of Christ Jesus, we pray. Amen

Charge and Blessing

Go forth into the world to live as those baptized into Christ's mission. And may the eternal light of God keep you rock-solidly immersed in the river of life in the peace and power of Holy Spirit now and forevermore, in the name of Jesus+. **Amen.**

Hymn

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Robert Stevens

Sources:

www.presbyterianmission.org

<https://sundaysandseasons.com>

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BAPTISM OF OUR LORD SUNDAY @

https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/baptism_of_our_lord.pdf

Shawano Leader, Shawano, Wisconsin, article by the Rev. Stephen L. Shriner, published January 8, 1999.

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