

**Sunday, January 11, 2015**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

### **Sermon - Baptized, Beloved and Blessed**

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Baptism is a sacrament, which means it is an opportunity to receive God's grace-to experience God's presence.

Most of us were baptized as babies, so we probably don't recall that moment when the Holy Spirit descended upon us.

However, all four gospels tell this same story about Jesus in such descriptive terms that we can imagine what it would be like.

Jesus' baptism was not a little sprinkle of water administered to his head by a robed minister.

Jesus put his whole self into the Jordan River under the direction of wild John the Baptist, clothed in camel's hair with a leather belt, eating wild locusts and honey.

When he emerged from the water the "heavens were torn apart and the Spirit descended like a dove and landed on him."

He was changed. He was anointed.

A voice said that he was beloved.

Right there, on the banks of the Jordan the voice from heaven declared this man Jesus as the Son of God – the son with whom God is well pleased.

That is about as much affirmation anyone could ever hope for!

Whenever I hear this story I wonder if everyone heard the voice and saw the Spirit alighting on Jesus – or was it just Jesus.

Did he tell the story to his disciples and they recounted it in the gospel writings, or did all those assembled see the heavens open and hear the voice of God proclaiming his pleasure?

The moment of baptism for Jesus is an important turning point in his life.

It marks the start of his public ministry, but also tells us a lot more about Jesus than we may realize at first.

John's baptism was about confession of sin and receiving forgiveness.

Since Jesus was without sin, he had no need of John's baptism - which explains John's shock when Jesus arrived at the river.

Jesus, however, chose to be baptized because he wanted us to know that he stands with us in our brokenness and sinfulness.

He did not keep himself separate from us because we failed to meet his standards of holiness.

Rather, he jumped right into the mess of our lives.

He began by becoming one of us, and then he began to create a new community by inviting us into a different way of thinking, speaking, and being.

Jesus' baptism was not just an event that happened to Jesus a long time ago.

Jesus' baptism is an invitation that continues to beckon us today - to belong to a God-created, God-called community.

If we choose to accept the invitation, we discover that we, like Jesus, become those who are called to stand alongside the broken and hurting, the sinful and wayward people of our world.

We are called to invite them, through our acts and words of grace, love, justice and challenge, to become part of God's new community.

Earlier this week, Mary Luti, captured this call to Christian life in her daily devotion.

“Wherever Jesus went, things shook loose. Walking by the lake, he called to well-established fishermen. Right away, the story goes, they followed, giving the slip to the fixed points of their culture—home, clan, father, trade....

Early Christians called the church a Way.

You don't belong to it so much as travel it.

It's a movement, no pew potatoes need apply.

If you're a church person but are rarely moved—if there's no movement in your imagination, your conscience, your prayer, your opinions, your desires, your loyalties, or your commitments—you have a Way to go.”

How many times have you heard people say that they don't believe in God because of all the suffering in our world.

The argument is that all the pain and evil proves that, either there can be no God, or if there is a God, then God has abandoned us, which means that worship is useless.

The problem with this thinking is that it views God in a very unhelpful way - as a divine superman who is wholly apart from us and who should (according to us) come swooping in to save the day.

It also presents us as uninvolved and unable to influence anything that happens in our world.

As much as we ask God why God allows all the pain in our world, God could ask us the same question!

The story of Jesus' baptism reveals a very different picture of God and of us.

First, God shows us what we need to do and become in order to experience full, abundant, and meaningful life, and gives us a choice to listen or not.

Then, secondly, God comes and lives among us - within us - and shares our grief, our tears, our pain, our sin, while constantly calling us back to life.

So, not only does God journey with us through our suffering.

God also gives us the divine power and presence to navigate and heal our own brokenness.

This is what Jesus' baptism means for us!

In baptism, we see ourselves in a new mirror. God holds the mirror of Jesus Christ up to us and proclaims you are beautiful, you are whole, you are worthy, you are loved.

You are a beloved child of God.

That is who you are.

That is your true identity.

No matter what.

At our baptism promises were made on our behalf.

I would like to give you the opportunity to make those promises on your own.

I am going to ask you all the same questions that your parents and godparents were asked and I invite you to answer.

When we are finished, at the end of the service, in the baptismal font is a bowl of water from the Jordan River, brought from Israel by one of my colleagues.

I invite you to touch your fingers to the water and touch your forehead and name yourself "beloved."

If you choose, someone else can bless you or you can simply accept the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon you.

Do you desire to be baptized into the faith and family of Jesus Christ? (If so, say) *I do*.

Will you work to renounce the powers of evil and to receive the freedom of new life in Christ? (If so, say) *I will*.

Will you study and learn about the Christian faith so that you can profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

*I will, with the help of God.*

Do you promise, by the grace of God, to be Christ's disciples, to follow in the way of our Savior, to resist oppression and evil, to show love and justice, and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ as best you are able?

*I do, with the help of God.*

Do you promise, according to the grace given you, to grow with this community in the Christian faith, to help one another to be faithful members of the church of Jesus Christ, by celebrating Christ's presence, by furthering Christ's mission in all the world, and by offering the nurture of the Christian church affirming this baptism?

*I do, with the help of God.*

**Beloved,** I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and, the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit be upon you

Child of God, Disciple of Christ

Member of this church. Amen.