

Remember Your Baptism  
Sunday Epiphany 1, Year B  
Genesis 1: 1 – 5; Romans 6: 1 – 11; Mark 1: 4 – 11  
January 10, 2021

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

My grandfather loved to make a deal; trading livestock, putting on and going to auctions, flea markets or wherever else he could to barter and trade.

Some of the items he acquired he gave to me. They are, especially after his passing last year, some very treasured possessions. I think some of his passion for finding treasures like this was passed on to me. I loved rummaging through the stuff he had found.

Perhaps this is why I love television shows that do almost the same thing. Many of you probably watched the ‘Antiques Roadshow,’ where people would bring their heirlooms, antiques, etc and have them evaluated and appraised by experts. Sometimes, they would find out their stuff was worthless when it came to what someone else would pay for it, but to them, it was a treasured possession.

‘American Pickers’ is another fun show I like to watch. It has two guys who go around the country digging through barns, storage units, old buildings, etc. finding ‘rusty gold’. Sometimes they will surprise the owners of the ‘junk’ by paying a large amount of money for, what seemed to be, an old piece of junk. Why can’t we be so lucky? ☺

All of this brings to mind two old, but true, sayings, “one man’s junk is another man’s treasure,” and, “beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”

This is, believe it or not, what the season of Epiphany is really all about. We have a child, born of woman, laid in a manger. Not too different from any other birth at the time. The baby didn’t glow, he wasn’t royalty, wasn’t born in a palace... but, lowly, in a cattle stall among the livestock. Humble.

The season of Epiphany reveals to us that that wasn't just any child. And He didn't grow to be just any man. He was God incarnate; God in flesh. The Creator had become a creature. Instead of treading in the halls of heaven, He now trudged on the trails of men. Fallen men. Yet, born in the cattle stall, perhaps He was now used to the smell of our putrid sinful existence.

Christmas was all about God becoming man. Epiphany is all about that man being revealed as God. The two go together. Yet, today's reading is somewhat of a bridge between those two concepts; God becoming man and that man being revealed as God.

In our account from St. Mark this morning, St. John the Baptizer is calling people to repentance and washing them in the Jordan River. People were coming from all over to hear this odd man preach. Dressed in camel's hair, eating locusts and wild honey and forcefully demanding that even the most religious Jew return to God. He had their attention. He was apparently well known, even by King Herod. People knew him, heard him, hated him.

Then comes his cousin, Jesus. John had been telling people about Him. He does so even in our reading today. John knew that Jesus would do mightier things than him. He knew that Jesus' baptism would be one of greater significance than his.

And, here He is. Jesus has come to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. But, whoa...wait a minute... hold the phone... back up the bus... ☺

John is preaching and administering a baptism of repentance... and here is Jesus, the Son of God, God incarnate... wanting to be baptized by John!

Wasn't this the same water that we read about in our Old Testament reading; "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the*

waters” (Gen. 1:1-2). He created these waters. What can He gain by being washed in these waters?

After all, what does Jesus have to repent of? How does He need to return to God? What sin does He need to be washed of?

Simple answer... it’s not His sin and repentance that drew Him to that water. It wasn’t John’s preaching, either. Can I tell you a secret? He went to that water because of you.

The same reason He was born, and the same reason He was crucified, is the same reason He was baptized... for you.

Matthew even tells us that John did not want to baptize Jesus. Instead, he wanted to be baptized by Jesus!! But, Jesus, who lowered Himself from heaven to be made man, now lowers Himself into the muddy water of the Jordan to be baptized by a man. And He is baptized, not for Himself, but for all of mankind...for you.

One theologian, and I wish I could remember who, said that Jesus went into that water in order to sanctify that water, so that all who were then baptized in His name, would be saved.

The same God who created the waters, the same God who hovered over the waters, is the same God who sanctifies these waters to make you into a new creation.

St. Paul says, “<sup>3</sup> *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?* <sup>4</sup> *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

<sup>5</sup> *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his*” (Rom. 6:3-5).

Jesus’ baptism is a work of making things new; making you new.

In His baptism, the heavens were ripped apart. The Greek is the same word where we get the word 'schism'. It isn't a simple opening, but a violent splitting of the heavens, probably much more akin to the parting of the Red Sea in the book of Exodus... and how fitting is that?

Yet, even more than this violent cleaving of heaven, there is the voice of God... the same voice that created heaven and earth... and even the water... and, that voice, gives a proclamation even greater than John's, "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.*"

This same thing happens to you and I and all who are baptized. God marks you as His own. He becomes yours and you become His. There is a ripping apart of heaven as He provides you access to Him as He comes to you.

Not only is the voice and proclamation of God the Father at both Jesus' and your baptism, so is the Holy Spirit. We often see the Holy Spirit symbolized as a dove, just as He is in our stained glass behind the altar. We get that image from Jesus' baptism, where the Holy Spirit descends on Him like a dove.

It was this same Holy Spirit who hovered, I suppose like a dove, over the surface of the deep. It was the dove that told Noah that God's wrath and judgment was over as the waters began to recede and the earth was washed anew.

And, it is the Holy Spirit, like a dove, descending on Jesus as He comes up out of the water of the Jordan River. And, it is that very same Holy Spirit that comes to each of us in Baptism, as we are washed a new, joining, as St. Paul says, in the work of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus' death becomes our death. His resurrection will be our resurrection. He takes our sins and drowns them in the water and the tomb.

My friends, our world is troubled. We have seen violence this week and this past year. We have seen lies and deceit coming from all over. I am not surprised that many of us do not know what to do with the events of our world. It has been challenging. We are still being challenged.

But, let this day, the Baptism of Our Lord, remind you that you belong to something bigger than the current affairs of this world. Remember your baptism.

Broken relationships, broken bodies, loss of freedom, loss of loved ones... God isn't absent. He hasn't turned His attention from you. He loves you. He has claimed you through those waters. Remember what He has done for you. Becoming a baby, humiliating Himself by being hung on a tree, a criminal's death, receiving a baptism that He did not need, only because you do. So, remember your baptism.

Those waters joined you to Him and Him to you. *“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup> For one who has died has been set free from sin”* (Rom. 6:5-7).

Many of us sometimes feel like junk; dirty, forgotten, useless, used, and thrown away. But, our God, takes us and in the waters of baptism, washes us and makes us new. What man saw as junk, God sees as a treasure. Remember your baptism.

In those sacred waters, what is His; His glory, righteousness, holiness... has become yours. Take comfort that He has done what needed to be done for your salvation and your good... and He will continue to do just that. Remember your baptism.

*So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

*Amen.*