

## **First Sunday after the Epiphany**

### **The Baptism of our Lord**

**Year A RCL**

**January 8, 2023**

Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17

***"I have put my Spirit upon him."***

By: The Rev. Dr. Fabian Villalobos

At the beginning of this new year, the celebration of the baptism of Jesus calls us to reflect on our own baptism. For us Christians, baptism is the founding moment of new life in Jesus; each new believer that is baptized is immersed in the death and resurrection of Jesus and receives the Holy Spirit. From baptism, Christians are assisted by the powerful and permanent grace of God. We become members of the Church and are part of the Body of Christ and consequently we are called to accept and profess Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

The Trinitarian manifestation of God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, becomes evident in the baptism of each person. Therefore, baptism is the sacrament that gives us identity and defines what it means to be Christians. The voice of the Father heard from heaven referring to Jesus, "This is my Son, the

Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" applies to each person- son and daughter, of God who is baptized. In this same way, Jesus received the Holy Spirit to be the Messiah and God manifested his presence in Him. We and all believers receive the same Holy Spirit. God is pleased with our existence. Every Christian is therefore chosen by the Father and each believer is valuable and unique.

Jesus begins his public life and ministry after being baptized by John in the Jordan River and demonstrates through his life and ministry that he was obedient to the Father. There was coherence between his words and actions, that he came into the world to fulfill his salvation mission. Likewise, at the beginning of this new year, the liturgy calls us to begin our year with the resolution to not be cultural believers, but be Christians who are committed, coherent and consistent with our baptism.

On the day of Baptism, a Baptismal Covenant is made which is an alliance between the person who is going to receive baptism and God. If an infant is being baptized, the pact is between his/her family and God. The purpose of the covenant is to understand that God's promises and blessings are always with us when we obey and commit to growing in the knowledge, love, and service of God. By virtue of the Baptismal Covenant before God, we commit ourselves to

imitate Jesus: to live, act, and collaborate in the development of God's mission for all creation, doing our part responsibly and obediently.

In correspondence to our commitment in the Baptismal Covenant, God guarantees that he never abandons us or leaves us alone, God provides the guidance and presence of the Holy Spirit. The words we hear in Isaiah's prophecy, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations." Isaiah 42:1, are fulfilled in each baptized member. God provides each believer with the opportunity to grow and develop all their capacities, and to always seek justice for all.

"I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." Acts 10:34-35. To fear God and to do what is right is simply to develop the Baptismal Covenant. The way we worship God and serve him is manifested in the specific place and time in which we live, showing others with our actions the love we profess we have for God.

"You will know them by their fruits" Mt 7:16, this expression in the Gospel of Saint Matthew clarifies how actions rather than words define our Christian identity. Today more than ever there is a need for coherent Christians, sincere

about their own spiritual growth, committed to their own conversion, witnesses of God's justice. Such a Christian strives to grow in relationship with Jesus and strives to live the Baptismal Covenant.

One of the tragedies we witness is that many baptized do not grow in their Baptismal Covenant, they are baptized and remain "childish" in their faith. They have not yet learned to truly love others. Some of these "immature" Christians although fully grown, make of our society a place of confusion, a false Christian society where personal interest takes precedence over the common good and where justice is the selfish fulfillment of the person's whims.

If we have been baptized and are the chosen and beloved children of God, we must strive to live our Baptismal Covenant. We need to imitate Jesus, obedient to death on the cross. We need to stop being or imitating the "irresponsible" Christian who behaves and lives only as a cultural Christian. Precisely because we are baptized, we need to grow in awareness of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in us, and strive to produce fruits of justice and conversion, even if this means sacrificing and giving up our comforts or privileges.

The way we express our Christian identity is through actions of justice and mercy. We teach the world of our Baptismal Covenant through the inclusion, respect, and love that we have for others. Although the Baptismal Covenant

lasts our entire lives, the process of transformation and growth begins when we understand that God dwells in us in the Person of the Holy Spirit and is always available to grow and do his work in the world.

As we celebrate the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, let us be grateful for our own baptism, for our parents, godparents, and the circumstances of our baptismal life. Let us embrace and commit to the Baptismal Covenant as an instrument of growth. Let us receive the gift of being born again in the Holy Spirit and let us strive to live here and now responsibly the love that God grants us. Amen.