

“The Baptism of our Lord”

Birthdays are a special treat for us to celebrate. And it is good that we do this because each of us is God’s unique and special creation. What are your traditions for celebrating your birthday? Singing the birthday song, blowing out candles on a cake, receiving gifts and special surprises? Perhaps your loved ones give you a special meal, a birthday lunch or dinner, that is your favorite?

What is less often celebrated is our baptism birthday. Perhaps your Godparent remembers you on the anniversary of that special day? But often we totally forget that special day. Baptism birthdays remind us that we were chosen to be welcomed into the kingdom of God, gifted with the Holy Spirit, washed clean of all sin (past, present and future), and marked as a child of our gracious God. Sounds like an event worth celebrating! If you know your baptism anniversary date, mark it on your calendar to celebrate. And if you don’t know, ask a parent or church representative or just pick a day to remember your baptism anniversary. Remembering also helps us renew our appreciation of and reaffirming our baptism.

This idea of remembering or renewing our baptism often comes up on the special Sunday called “The Baptism of our Lord”. It is in the season of Ordinary Time (or the Epiphany Season), an accordion season between Epiphany and Ash Wednesday. It marks the Baptism of Jesus in Mathew 3:13-17. Jesus was about 30 years old and starting his earthly ministry when he was baptized. It began his three-year teaching and preaching ministry that would lead him to the cross and empty tomb. He asked his cousin John to Baptize him. John didn’t want to baptize Jesus. He felt unworthy since Jesus had no need for Baptism. John baptized people to show they were repenting of their sin and Jesus didn’t need to do this. Jesus was the perfect lamb of God, pure and holy. Yet he knew it was the right thing to do and would also serve as a reminder going forward when he instructed his disciples to share the sacrament of Baptism as they went out to make disciples. If Jesus would be baptized how much more should we, who are by nature sinful, request this great gift of baptism.

So, John poured out the waters of the Jordon River over Jesus. And we, like him, share this sacred action of baptism. And this special church day helps us to reflect on our own baptisms. Perhaps we even confirm the faith given in that sacrament, for many of us when we were just little infants. In fact, this is the entire purpose of Confirmation. To affirm or reaffirm the faith given in our baptism. And this is something we don’t just do once but repeatedly.

Happy Baptism Birthday to each of you. May Jesus, who was baptized by John, be your dear and precious savior as you reaffirm the faith given in the waters of baptism. And thanks to Koinonia for giving us the perfect retreat setting in God’s beautiful creation to reflect on these important subjects. Your baptism birthday is worth celebrating. Hurray!

- Rev. Dr. Robert Hartwell