

January 8, 2017

## "Be the Hope"

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris



*Matthew 3:13-17*

*Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."*

The leap each year from Epiphany to the Baptism of Jesus is always something of a shock to our awareness, isn't it? For weeks, we've been basking in the stories of the birth of the Christ Child and today he has fast-forwarded into a young man, being baptized by John in the River Jordan. In the blink of any eye, many years have passed, but isn't that how parents and grandparents describe their own children and grandchildren—a babe, a toddler, a teen, an adult....moving at lightning speed through this wondrous experience of life? I'm sure it won't be too long before Ben and Jennifer and big sisters Arabella and Georgina feel the exact same way about Baby William.

But today we celebrate him for the wee boy he is, as a Scottish friend would say. We give thanks for the gift of new life that William incarnates, and with his parents and sisters, we rejoice in all that God has already given him and delight in imagining all that he will become, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And how blessed we are, all of us, to renew our baptismal vows this morning. This annual service gives us all the opportunity to pause again at the beginning of this New Year and focus on who we are—who we really are—who we hope to become--in the sight of God and as members of this community, the church. And it gives us a chance to remember that in our baptism, God calls us, each and every one, names us, claims us, gifts us, and empowers us to be the person God is creating us to be as a beloved child of God.

The wonderful author, Kathleen Norris, noted that, to the earliest Christians, the Baptism of Jesus--the story found in all four gospels--was as important as Christmas itself—important because it indicates "that the incarnation [God made flesh] is not only about Jesus [and what God is revealing to us in Jesus]—but about us...[it] demonstrates to Christians not only what God is like but also who God wishes us to be."

In baptism, God claims us as God's own—each of us--precious, beloved, entrusted, and upheld by God. In our baptism, God trusts us with the name "child of God" so that, knowing ourselves to be special and loved, we can share that love with all whom we meet. In our baptism, God sends the Holy Spirit to anoint us with caring and compassion. In our baptism, God sends the Holy Spirit to empower us to spend our lives on others.

God created each of us with an inherent desire to make a difference. Baptism is about who God is and who God wishes us to be in this world. About who God wishes us to be for this world. About the kind of person God creates us to be, a person who embodies, in our own way, in our own life, in our own family, in our own work, in our own circle of friends—a child of God who embodies the marks of the Kingdom. Compassion. Justice.

Generosity. Caring. In our baptism, we are blessed to be a blessing.

Many of you will remember the American actor, Christopher Reeve. In the midst of a successful career, star of "Superman," Reeve became a quadriplegic after being thrown from a horse in an equestrian competition and required a wheelchair and breathing apparatus for the rest of his life. For Reeve, this was not the end of his life, but the beginning of a new chapter of advocacy and activism. He became a new kind of Superman, lobbying on behalf of people with spinal cord injuries. Inspiring and encouraging so many others, he once said: "Once you choose hope, anything's possible."

"Once you choose hope, anything's possible." What an incredibly empowering way to think of life, and of the life we lead as baptized Christians. Choose hope. We know this well. "Be the hope" has become our motto in these years since Hurricane Katrina. This is the hope we see in Christ Jesus who chooses the hope of a world made new, a life of healing and salvation for all. Jesus chooses to live into the hope which God promises.

As we baptize baby William this morning and as we renew our baptismal vows, we are choosing that same hope, are choosing a life of hope, are choosing to trust in God's promise of hope for our lives and for the world.

Remember that baptism is not a one-way street. The Gospel tells us that as Jesus came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending and alighting on him and he heard a voice from heaven saying: "This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased."

Did you hear it? The action has shifted from Jesus to God. God opens the heavens. God comes to Jesus. God speaks to him. God declares love for him. In baptism, God chooses Jesus. Hope chooses Jesus.

As in Jesus' baptism, so in ours. God comes to us. God chooses us. Hope chooses us.

As we move towards baptismal renewal this morning, I'm going to first invite our ushers to come forward now to receive our tithes and offerings. As the offering is received, I'd also like you to take out the index card that was in your OOW this morning and write on it clearly the name with which you were baptized, your Christian name, first and middle. Bring your card forward when you come in a few moments to renew your baptismal vows. The pastors will read from these, collect them in these baskets, and then place them all on the altar table this morning, as a symbol of the rededication of our lives to God this day. We will also give you the gift of a small shell to remind you of your baptism. Keep it in your pocket or your purse—somewhere it will remind you of the hope of this day.

If you have not been baptized and would like to be baptized this morning, please just let us know as you come.

May the beauty and power of this day renew your life, ground you in the truth of your baptism, and fill you with hope.

And remember: once you choose hope and once hope chooses you, anything is possible. Be the hope!

AMEN.

Notes:

Kathleen Norris. "Living by the Word: Marked for a purpose." Dec. 25, 2007. *The Christian Century*.