

January 12, 2020 • Baptism of the Lord • Renewal of Baptism Vows • Installation of 2020 Leadership

"This Little Light of Mine"

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris

Isaiah 42:1-9

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. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

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."

On this second Sunday after the Epiphany, the manifestation of God in Christ Jesus continues through the adult Jesus at his baptism. John baptizes Jesus in the river Jordan. And the Spirit of God is palpably present, lest we miss it. It is visible like a dove and it is audible as a voice, saying: "This is my beloved Child, in whom I am well pleased."

In these weeks of the church year that we call "the season of Epiphany", the Spirit of God acts again and again to make sure we see the presence of God in the birth and life of Jesus Christ. The same Spirit that was present in the very beginning in Genesis is present in the beginning of this new life. This new beginning has been marked with theatrical effects: that big star in the sky, choirs of angels in the heavens singing at the top of their lungs, exotic Kings traveling from the East. It continues with a voice from heaven itself—all to make sure we get the point: this new beginning is Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Savior of the world. He is the one God has been promising to send.

On this day, the day of his baptism, Jesus is given power through the Holy Spirit to bring new life to God's people. He is given the power to proclaim Good News to you who are poor, to bind up you who are brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to you who are captives, to release you who are imprisoned, to comfort all you who mourn.

All during the season of Epiphany, God is saying to people as lonely and frightened and confused as we sometimes are, "Look, you people, I am here. I am with you. I share your life. And I give you power to live as my children and to share in my plans and dreams for this world."

Do we believe that? Do we believe that Jesus was given the power to do all that, on God's behalf, in our lives and our world? Do we believe that we have that power, too, through OUR baptism, power just waiting to be claimed and actualized? Are we brave enough to claim it for our lives and act accordingly?

Our annual service of baptismal renewal is so very important. It offers 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, names us, claims us, gifts us and empowers us to be the person God is creating us to be. Today we participate in a time of baptismal renewal to remember the significance of our baptism. We come to feel the water on our foreheads, the sign and the seal of God's presence and power still in our lives, still available to us with just as much potency as ever, with just as much life-changing potential as ever.



We come to reconnect to God, to our deepest selves, to human community, to the creation, and to purpose in our lives, and to God's purpose in Jesus' ministry. You see, we are not just given power for our own personal enhancement or fulfillment. We are given the power of God through the Holy Spirit as it now comes to us to participate in the peace-making, justice-creating, love-enacting work as disciples of Jesus Christ.

We believe that all baptized Christians are children of light. The early church called baptism by the Greek name, *photismos*, which means "enlightening" or "illumination". When we put Christ in our baptism, we become radiant with his light. We each become part of the light of Christ's glory and truth and set out, through our lives, to share that light with others. The energy of light is transformed within us into the generative energy of love and service. God's light shines in each and every one of us.

Look carefully again at John Swanson's beautiful "Festival of Lights" on the cover of your Order of Service. We are so fortunate to have John here with us this morning to talk about his work and to receive our questions. And we are so very grateful to him for so generously sharing his work with us.

For a moment now, see yourself in the procession of the "Festival of Lights" this morning. Look closely at one of those beautiful faces and see your own face there, your light adding to the light of love and service. Not alone. Not lonely. Not afraid. Not confused. Full of beauty and energy and purpose and hope. See yourself among the never-ending stream of Christ's light-bearers, filled with the light of Christ and sharing that light with one another and the whole world and whole of creation.

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. This weekly giving of our financial gifts for the work of the church is a reminder of just how blessed we are and how much of ourselves we are called to give in return. And 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, and 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.

If anyone here this morning has not been baptized and would choose to do so today, please let us know as you come forward and we will receive you into baptism. This might be the day that you hear the voice of God calling you into a new life of deeper faith and commitment.

Come, ready to receive the power available to you to burn bright with the light of Christ, power for new life, new joy, new courage.