

Baptism of our Lord  
Sermon Text: Isaiah 43:1-7  
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22  
Date Preached: January 10, 2010

One of the things that I like about being here at St. Paul's, is this particular Sunday in our congregation's life. The one holy catholic and apostolic church in its many expressions celebrates this day the baptism of our Lord. For us at St. Paul it is a time when we celebrate again, those who have been baptized throughout the previous year. Understand, not every congregation has this practice.

There are many reasons to like how we recognize our baptismal life together. For one, it is a celebration of our communal life. Granted, not everyone could be here today. But look at the names of those who have become part of God's family here in this place; we have grown. It is reason to celebrate.

Our communal life is further witnessed at each baptism itself. I've appreciated the comments that have been offered about inviting young children forward to see the baptisms more closely. For one thing, there is an unconscious message being communicated. That message is that the newly baptized is one of us.

The one who is baptized is important enough for the youth who are his or her peers to surround them with their presence.

Our communal life is further witnessed when there is more than one person baptized at each service. Some have said that such occurrences take away from the specialness of the celebration. Biblically, it appears that not only is each person baptized special, but it is clear that in most cases it was whole households that were baptized at once.

Last year we had many members of one extended family baptized during the Easter Vigil. Likewise we had a father and son baptized on the same day. And even when two unrelated families have their children baptized on the same Sunday, there lies the opportunity to reinforce the truth of our place in the wider family of God.

All the ways in which we recognize the importance of baptism in the life of each individual reinforce what God says to each of us in Scripture. For you see, we've all been here. At one point we were brought to the waters of baptism. So each baptism is a reminder of God's Word not only spoken to the newly baptized, but to us.

God's Word to us is that you are precious. God created you. God formed you. "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you," says our Lord. When you walk through the challenges and struggles of daily life, we may wish to be spared them; yet in the midst of those challenges God is with you.

This is so much a crucial life-giving Word to us because it is one that we seldom hear Monday through Saturday. In many ways we are smothered under plowed hills of snow by messages that weaken our self esteem and our image of who we are as God's children.

We will be blanketed with a blizzard of messages that say you need this diet to loose weight, you need this deodorant to smell good, you need hair coloring to look younger, etc. etc. etc.

We form our identities in so many fleeting ways, by where we go to school, what activities we participate in, our jobs, that when we loose those identities, we find ourselves tail spinning and question our value.

What can seem likes so quiet a voice in the midst of all these other competing messages is the voice of our Lord who says, "you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you."

God loves YOU! God Son whose baptism we celebrate is the one who indeed redeems our life from the grave.

God knows full well there are things in our life that are broken and messed up. No we are not as cute as the newborn babies crying their eyes out because someone they don't know is pouring water on their head when they are trying to sleep.

Yet be we young or old, in the early days or the later years of our life or somewhere in between, God's message is the same. YOU are precious in my sight.

You are my child whom I claimed in baptism; my beloved; with whom I am well pleased. This message is for each of us. And with any good message it needs to be told. So I'm going to ask you to be bold. I'm going to ask you to do something that may not seem Lutheran but truly it is. I want you to share this message with someone you know. And to practice, get up out of your pews, turn to three people, one of whom cannot be an immediate relative and say to that person, "You are precious in God's sight."