

### **Matthew 3:13-17**

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.'

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Retired Presbyterian pastor John Buchanan tells of baptizing a two-year-old boy in a Sunday worship service. After the child had been baptized, Pastor Buchanan put his hand on the little boy's head and addressed him like this. He said, "You are a child of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit and you belong to Jesus Christ forever."

Unexpectedly, the little boy looked up and responded, "Uh-oh."

Of course, the people in the congregation smiled. Buchanan wrote this: "From the mouth of a child came a stunning theological affirmation about Baptism."

The kid was right. Baptism ought to be an "uh-oh" kind of event. It should not be a mere ritual of the church that we go through without some deep soul searching and prayer. No matter our age, be it two years old, two months old, or even 102 years old, baptism represents a movement from a world of darkness to one of light, from the kingdom of strife to the kingdom of love, from the stark reality of certain death to the promise of glorious and everlasting life. Baptism should never be regarded lightly.

One reason that baptism is an "uh-oh" experience is that it represents responsibilities on our part. So there are responsibilities? Uh-oh! In baptism we became a part of the Body of Christ where we are called to take on the mind of Christ. It means becoming part of a faith community and striving to be like Christ

who loved people others found disgusting and pushed away. Like St Paul, we can say: "I no longer live. Christ lives in me!"

Roy Lloyd, a Lutheran minister, once interviewed Mother Teresa of Calcutta. He said that one of his questions and one of her answers stands out as "a bright sun burning in my mind." He asked her, "What's the biggest problem in the world today?" And she answered, without hesitation, "The biggest problem in the world today is that we draw the circle of our family too small. We need to draw it larger every day."

With all the problems in our world today, it would be easy to answer that question by pointing fingers at other people and think that they are the problem. And that's what makes Mother Teresa's response so amazing. She is saying that the problem is not so much with the world as it is with us. We need to see more people as our neighbor than we are currently doing. Our baptisms call us to do the same.

We are at a time and place where so many would like to identify and define us by many, many names: Democrat or Republican, conservative or liberal, American or foreigner, gay or straight, rich or poor, Black or White, and the list goes on.

But, we are followers of Christ. That is who we are. All other labels are subservient to being a follower of Christ, or our faith is merely window dressing over whatever ideology or priorities we may be been drawn too.

As we begin the New Year, I encourage us all to start reading the gospel of Luke, or any other gospel. Work your way through it over the next weeks and months. Don't hurry, stop and reflect, underline passages where you see Jesus teaching about how we are to live and what his priorities are. Then challenge yourself to make that your daily agenda. This is what it means to be baptized. It's more than window dressing, it's a way of life. Again, like Saint Paul said, now we can say: "I no longer live. Christ lives in me."

Baptism reminds us that we are a child of God. That's our new name at Baptism: Child of God. It helps us to remember that our primary identify is a child of God. And not just a child – a Beloved child of God.

That's something to write on your bathroom mirror so you see it the first thing in the morning: "I am a beloved child of God".

In the Bible, names are powerful. The very next verse in today's Gospel reading about his baptism is the narrative about Jesus being led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested.

Note that this happens only *after* he has been baptized and named beloved.

In the say way, when we remember that God has also named us "beloved" in our baptisms – that we are beloved sons and daughters of God, then we are able to go into the wilderness and flourish among the swirl of other names, identities, and values that compete for our attention and allegiance. None of them compare to being a beloved child of God. This is the foundation from which everything else in our lives flows out from.

For a moment now, say your name quietly to yourself ... You are a beloved child of God.

May God write that upon our hearts.

Amen.