

**Sermon for the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord Jesus
January 9, 2022.
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Chester, Vermont.**

Readings:

Isaiah 43:1-7;

Psalm 29;

Acts 8:14-17;

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22.

Hymns:

Hymn 135, Hymnal 1982, "Song of thankfulness and praise;

Hymn 636 – How Firm a Foundation;

Hymn 139 – When Jesus went to Jordan's stream;

Hymn 95 from My Heart Sings Out – Crashing Waters at Creation;

Hymn 448 from Hymnal 1982 – O love, how deep, how broad, how high.

A COMPOSITION CALLED A SERMON OR HOMILY THIS IS NOT. IT IS MORE IN THE CHARACTER OF STAGE DIRECTIONS FOR AN IMPROVISATIONAL DRAMA OR PLAY with comments and observations. THIS PREACHER AIMS TO SEE US ALL SHARING JESUS BAPTISMS IN OUR OWN AND WHEN WE READ OF THE HEAVENS OPENED AND JESUS DECLARED GOD'S BELOVED CHILD IT IS A DECLARATION OF THE STATUS OF EACH ONE OF US, AND BEYOND THAT, OF ALL CREATION. THE AUTHOR OF LUKE'S GOSPEL HAD ROUGHLY A GENERATION TO DWELL ON THIS EVENT AND SUBSEQUENT LIFE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND TO TEST ITS TRUTH. DURING THAT GENERATION BOTH THE TEMPLE AND THE CITY OF JERUSALEM WERE DESTROYED, IN THE YEAR 70. SCHOLARS ARE UNCERTAIN OF THE DATE WHEN LUKE WAS WRITTEN, BUT CONSENSUS SUGGESTS AROUND THE YEAR 85. GIVE OR TAKE 10 OR 15 YEARS EITHER WAY. SO MOST LIKELY IT WAS WRITTEN AFTER THAT DESTRUCTION OF THE

CENTER OF JEWISH 1ST CENTURY IDENTITY, WHICH MUST HAVE BEEN A TIME OF GREAT FEAR AND ANXIETY.

IT IS INTERESTING IN THAT REGARD THAT THE CREATORS OF THE LECTIONARY, THE SCRIPTURE READING SCHEDULE FOR OUR SUNDAY WORSHIP, PAIRED THE READING FROM ISAIAH WITH THIS GOSPEL ACCOUNT. IN ISAIAH THE TEACHING IS OF GOD'S LOVE FOR CREATION CALLING US BACK FROM OUR OWN DESTRUCTIVE ACTIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES FOR US. WE LIVE WITH SUCH FEARS TODAY AS THE SOCIAL MEDIA VIBRATE WITH NON FACTUAL STATEMENTS ABOUT STOLEN ELECTIONS AND SEVERAL NATIONS MOVE MORE TOWARD AUTHORITARIAN RULE ONE MAN(ARE ALL THE AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES HEADED BY MEN?) ARE.....YOU KNOW THE CURRENT LIST: TURKEY, NICARAGUA, HONDURAS, VENEZUELA, BELARUS, HUNGARY, AND WHO KNOWS WHERE SUDAN, SOUTH SUDAN, AND ETHIOPIA ARE RIGHT NOW?

NOT TO MENTION THE FEARS OF THE COVID VIRAL ILLNESSES. IN THE FACE OF ALL THAT, DO NOT FEAR.

FEAR IN INFANTS AND SMALL CHILDREN IS BEST RELIEVED BY LOVING THEM AND BEING WITH THEM IN A WORLD OF FEAR. THAT BEING WITNESS CELEBRATING THE WORTH AND BELOVEDNESS OF EACH OF US IS EFFECTIVE FOR ANY WHO SUFFER OPPRESSION, RACIAL OR ETHNIC PREJUDICE. WE ARE JOINED IN OUR OWN BAPTISMS TO THIS BAPTISM OF JESUS AND ITS DECLARATION OF OUR STATUS AS GOD'S CREATIONS, GOD'S DAUGHTER AND SONS, GOD'S BELOVEDS, AND CHARGED TO SHARE THAT STATUS AND MAKE IT EFFECTIVE IN OUR CHURCHES, COMMUNITIES, AND THE WORLD. THERE'S A LONG WAY TO GO IN ACHIEVING THAT. BUT TO THAT END, EACH OF US HERE WAS BROUGHT INTO COMMUNITY BY A COMMUNITY ACT CALLED BAPTISM. WE ALL HAVE HAD SOME SENSE OF THAT

IDENTITY OF GOD'S DECLARATION OF US AS THE BELOVEDS BY OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE COMMUNITY THAT HOLDS AND BLESSES US.

IT WAS TO SHARE THAT SENSE THAT WE WERE BROUGHT TO BAPTISM. EACH OF US WAS BROUGHT TO IT PROBABLY WITH A VARIETY OF MOTIVATIONS AND THEOLOGIES. THERE IS NOT TIME TODAY TO EXAMINE ALL THE VARIOUS THEOLOGIES THAT HAVE ACCOMPANIED AND MOTIVATED THOSE WHO BROUGHT US TO BAPTISM. BUT GROUP TOGETHER AS A WHOLE, THEY ARE ALL GIVEN WORTH AND WONDROUS VALUE BY JESUS BAPTISM AND GOD'S SPEAKING THAT BELOVEDNESS.

TO CELEBRATE THAT, I WANT TO INVITE US EACH BRIEFLY AND SUCCINCTLY TO NAME THE PLACE AND TIME OF OUR BAPTISMS. WE'LL CIRCULATE AROUND THE ROOM. IF ALL YOU KNOW IS A CITY, SIMPLY SAY, I WAS BAPTIZED IN TIMBUCTOO IN 1892. BUT IF YOU KNOW THE NAME OR DENOMINATION OF THE CHURCH ADD THAT, AND WHO BROUGHT YOU TO BAPTISM IF YOU KNOW THAT. WE CELEBRATE ALL THOSE NAMING OF OUR BELOVEDNESS TODAY.

WE CELEBRATE BAPTISM WITHIN A PARTICULAR TRADITION IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH. AND WE REMIND OURSELVES OF OUR BAPTISMS AS WE REPEAT THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT THEREBY RENEWING OUR BAPTISMAL VOWS TODAY. WE GAIN IMPETUS TO BE ONE MAKING THE REST OF OUR WORLD, FROM COMMUNITY LEVEL AND OUTWARD FROM THERE, TO SPREADING GOD'S HEALING IN OUR NATION AND WORLD AS WE LIVE OUT OUR BAPTISMAL VOWS. THEY ARE VOWS WE CANNOT HOPE TO LIVE UP TO WITHOUT GOD'S SPIRIT WORKING IN US AND IN AS WE KEEP EACH OTHER COMPANY IN THIS MISSIONAL VENTURE INTO TEACHING THAT LOVE IS THE WAY.

I WANTED TO SPRINKLE US WITH BLESSED WATER TODAY,
BUT COVID MAKES ME CAUTIOUS ABOUT DOING SO. THERE
IS BAPTISMAL WATER AT THE FONT WITH WHICH YOU MAY
HAVE CROSSED OR ANOINTED YOURSELF AS YOU CAME IN
TODAY, AND DO SO AGAIN AS YOU LEAVE GIVING THANKS
FOR THOSE WHO BROUGHT YOU TO BAPTISM INTO THE
BELOVED COMMUNITY.

Amen