

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως  
**Epiphany 1-B; 10 January 2021**  
**St. Thomas', Glassboro – Todd Foster**  
(rev. 202101091301)

**Baptism of our Lord**

*In nomine...*

**I. About Epiphany**

The Good News starts here. Today begins the season of Epiphany, a brief season in between all the holy days surrounding Christmas and all the holy days surrounding Easter. This is also the season when the darkest part of winter has passed. Though some long nights remain, each one will be shorter than the last.

Darkness is precisely where the Bible begins. The world begins as a formless void, covered with darkness and deep waters. It is nothingness and it is chaos. That was the material God had to work with. But a *wind from God*<sup>1</sup> was blowing. And God spoke. The first thing God created with God's words was light. And that light instantly brought order: a distinction of light and darkness, day and night. God began to do a new thing in the world, to bring order and light. To make the world a good place for *us* to live. The darkness and the chaos began to abate. At that moment, the fabric of reality changed.

**II. John's Baptism**

Mark begins his Gospel by pointing us back to Genesis, the beginning. He even begins with the same words: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

First Mark points to John the baptizer. John found his job description in the prophet Isaiah, and he was living it out, *proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*<sup>2</sup> John's job was to help prepare the way for this new thing God was doing. Repentance, as John explained it, was to desist from those things that separated a person from God and from neighbor, those things we call "sins," and to be open to something new and unexpected. Repentance was to be prepared for a re-ordering of one's life, a turning away from chaos and disorder. This would mean changes in the things a person thought and said and did, an alteration in the choices a

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1 Gen 1.2b NRSV.

2 Mark 1.4b NRSV.

person made, what they paid attention to, and how they spent their time. Baptism and change weren't for everyone: John wasn't welcomed into the cities as a respected guru. He remained out in the wilderness places, and those who were open to his message went out to him.

Then Jesus, John's cousin, came to be baptized. And it was the creation story told all over again. There was the chaos and the infertility of the wilderness. There was heaven and earth and water. When Jesus had been baptized, that heaven that God had created was torn back open, and the Holy Spirit became visible like a dove. Once again, God spoke: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."<sup>3</sup> Creation happened again, and a new light shone out in the person of Jesus. Once again, the fabric of the universe was changed.

### **III. Chaos and Baptism**

This week was one for the history books, the week our nation's Capitol was attacked and occupied by its own people. It was a week of chaos and darkness, a week of obscure motives and the sowing of terror. But the pattern we see in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is the consistent capacity of God to make order from chaos, to shine light into darkness, and to do God's work precisely where it is needed most.

Today we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord, and as we do so we remember our own baptisms. We remember the baptisms of Don and Kane just a couple month ago, in the rainy beginning of November. We remember, perhaps, our own children or even grandchildren's baptisms. We remember our own baptisms, whether we were old enough to be aware of them or not. We remember that we have been baptized, that we have followed in the footsteps of Jesus.

This doesn't mean that dark times have not come into our lives. Baptism doesn't mean that we have not, at times, found ourselves nearly drowning in the waters of chaos and disorder, buffeted by the lies and contempt of others. Baptism doesn't mean we haven't struggled with our relationships, with our jobs or our finances, with addiction. Baptism doesn't make the chaos and the deep waters of our life disappear.

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<sup>3</sup> Mark 1.11b NRSV.

In fact, Baptism is grounded in those waters, isn't it? Water is the central symbol of baptism. It is precisely in the chaos, the disorder, the deep waters, that we discover God at work. It is there, we might say, that God does God's best work, God's original work.

God has spoken a creative word into our lives. God has shone a light and created order in our own worlds. In your baptism, God spoke those words over you, "This is my daughter, my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." The fabric of reality changed in that moment for you and for me. Our world will never be the same again.

The Gospel begins with baptism. Baptism changes things. In baptism we consent, we acquiesce, to the creative power of God at work in our lives, to bring order and light into our souls. Jesus experienced that creative power of God in his life as the Holy Spirit led him out into the desert. There he prayed and he dwelt with God. There he was tempted by Satan. There he overcame that temptation and oriented his life irrevocably toward the purposes of God. There Jesus began his public ministry.

What began at your baptism? That same creative power of God is at work in you. That same invitation is issued to you over and over. It isn't all milk and honey. Sometimes it's in the desert where God does God's best work. Where God takes the chaos and uses it to find order, where God takes the darkness and uses it to find light.

During this season of Epiphany, with the increasing light and the faint promises of spring, I invite you to remember your baptism. Remember how the voice of God has spoken with power into your life, creating light where there was darkness and inviting you into a new order of things. You are God's beloved child; with you God is well pleased.

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Mark 1.1–11 NRSV

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,  
‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;  
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
“Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight” ’,

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’