

## **BAPTISM – BECOMING WHAT GOD DESIRES**

**1 Epiphany – Year A – Grace Church, Haddonfield, NJ**

**January 9, 2011 - Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close**

Now that we are in the season of Epiphany, the Biblical readings will try to help us understand who Jesus is and what it means for us to be his followers. Herb O'Driscoll talks about today's readings are about the road to our "becoming" ... becoming what God wants.

Matthew presents us with the story of Jesus' baptism. This is what some would call the call of Jesus. In it, we learn about Jesus' life. At his baptism, his identity is made known to us. Jesus is anointed ... commissioned to take up his unique ministry. One of the striking features in Matthew's account is the voice that calls Jesus "beloved."

The Baptism is about significant change for Jesus. He begins to move in a new direction and face a new future. The question for us, his followers, is "Are we willing to fuse our lives with Jesus' life? Are we willing to become one of his disciples?"

Isaiah gives us insight into the nature of Jesus' call. The prophet is writing during the Israelite's captivity in Babylon. He offers the people an image of hope and encouragement. Isaiah talks about God's ideal servant ... one who will bring justice and walk in relationship with God. The servant will be one who embodies God's desires for all of Israel and the nations. Christians long ago were quick to say that Jesus fulfills this role.

Herb says that Isaiah points us towards Jesus' vocation ... and ours! We too are called to bring about justice, to walk with God and to move beyond ourselves to serve others. Isaiah's servant becomes Jesus. Jesus servant ministry is ours as well.

Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism is his call and first step into public ministry. This is one of those moments in life that change a person's direction. For Jesus, baptism begins to set him on the road of becoming God's servant and our Messiah. The voice from heaven tells us who Jesus is, what he is becoming and where he's going.

We share in this common moment through our baptism. We are including those people being baptized today with us. We are all connected to God through Jesus and our baptism. God tells us who we are ... beloved ... loved by God and chosen. God tells us who we are becoming ... servants like Jesus. God tells us where we are going ... with Jesus.

The feature of Matthew's story that strikes me the most is God's voice. I wonder what God's voice sounds like? The words that come to Jesus are words of encouragement and reassurance. Sometimes, God's voice comes to us through the Bible, or through other people. God does speak to us ... but we too often don't hear or pay attention to what is said to us!

Is there a common story that helps us to make a connection with Jesus and his baptism today? One come to mind for me. Have you heard about the homeless man, Ted

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Williams? He's been in the news this past week. You see him on "You Tube" or in the news reports of this pass week. Ted was a man trying to make a go of life. The story first came to light when a reporter in Cleveland took notice of his sign. The reporter would also film him and hear his voice. Ted had a sign that said he wanted a job where he could use his God given gift ... his voice!

One of the beliefs Christians have is that at their Baptism, God gives us a gift that can be used to help us become who and what God wants. The dove, the symbol for the Holy Spirit, is the reminder of how God works and the gifts that God brings us. Look up at the window over our altar. There is the dove, the sign of God's love and the gift giver. Each of us has a gift.

Ted's story is an interesting one. He was a radio announcer before alcohol; drugs and crime became a way of life for him. Ted loses touch with God. He hadn't seen his mother in 20 years. The sign he held up caught the reporter's attention ... but when he spoke, Ted's beautiful voice didn't match with his scruffy and harried looks! The reporter aired the story, and within days, Ted's life dramatically changed.

Ted was offered a job and a place to stay. This past week he appeared on national television shows. Kraft Foods hired him to do voice for their commercials. The Cleveland Cavaliers offered him a job as their sports broadcaster at home games. Offers poured in! The crowning touch was a reunion on television with his mother.

But what you need to know is that during the telling of his story, Ted said that two years ago he began looking for God again. His daily prayer was "Please God, let my mom live to see another year and maybe this year I could get a job." Ted reconnected with God through prayer ... and two years later the miracle happen!

Ted's story is a baptism story. He was reborn ... he came into new life. Ted was reconnected with his family, had a job and was back on the road to becoming what God wished for him ... using the gift of his voice.

Our baptism is about becoming what God wishes for us. It's about being found by God and creating a relationship that will change directions for us ... and bring us into the light and life. Baptism has the power to help us discover our God given gift ... and use it!

Ted's story continues. At the end of the interview with NBC, he talked about the importance of God in his life. Ted said that this time around he has God in his life. He said that he acknowledged God on a daily basis gave God thanks and had a new sense of spirit in his life. Ted is living the story of becoming. There are more stories like his out there ... and ours can be part of the story of becoming what God desires for us.

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**Baptism is meant to bring us into a relationship with God through Jesus. We are to be like him. God calls us beloved too (which means chosen and loved). Baptisms are a new start on the road to becoming what God wants. Each time we witnessed a baptism, we are being reminded that we are still on the journey towards becoming. Just like Jesus, we too are called to be servants. We share the same goals. We are called to use our gifts to help make the world more what God desires. We too have hope and are being encouraged.**

**Jesus' epiphany is ours. Each of us is called to vocation. Jesus points us in the direction we are to go. The weeks ahead will help us to learn more about Jesus, and more about what it means for us to be Christians. As we travel with Jesus, we might ask ourselves some questions: How do we hear God's voice? What God given gift do we have to use (and are we using it)? What does God want us to become?**

**Today we welcome new members into our Church. As we do so, we are reminded that we are called to journey with Jesus too. May we live into our gifts and become what God desires. Amen.**