

Today, we celebrate a special Sunday in the liturgical year – Baptism of our Lord. It always throws me off a bit because we just celebrated the birth of Christ. And, last week was Epiphany Sunday, in which the Magi visited the baby Jesus and realized that he was God. In my mind right now, Jesus is still a baby...or at least a toddler.

The Bible doesn't tell us much about Jesus' childhood. He was born, was presented in the temple, became a refugee to Egypt to escape King Herod's massacre of the infants, got lost from his parents at age twelve during Passover, and then he was baptized around thirty years old just before his ministry began. What was he doing all this time before his baptism?

The Bible tells us in Luke 2:52: "Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor." In other words, he grew up, duh, but he also grew in wisdom, which put him in favor with God and others. Sometimes I forget the human side of Jesus. I used to think that since Jesus is God and God knows everything, then Jesus must've been born knowing everything. And, now, because I do know Jesus as my Lord, my God, who knows everything, I often forget that Jesus had the complete human experience. Even Jesus had to learn and grow. That's what he was doing in the temple at twelve and after – learning and growing in wisdom – to be ready for his ministry and all the hardships that he would endure.

That's one of the important reasons why he was baptized. It was the initiation

into the family of God, joining with other baptized brothers and sisters. God claimed him as his own: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (v. 22). Just as God claims Jesus as his son and welcomes him into the family of God, God claims us at our baptism as his sons and daughters, all joined together in his family.

The baptism of Jesus is troubling for some, theologically, because of their understanding of what baptism means. Many understand baptism as being cleansed from their sins, so why did Jesus *need* to be baptized if he never sinned? Jesus didn't *need* to be baptized. He *wanted* to be baptized, to join with us in God's family, to model for us the steps to take to enter into a covenant with God, and to fulfill his purpose designed by God. And, I think, he also *wanted* to please his Father.

Baptism does represent the forgiveness and cleansing of sin, but United Methodists understand the sacrament of baptism to mean much more. **We'll watch a short video on some of the other meanings.**

As the narrator says, "Baptism is walking into God's arms. We're walking through the door into God's presence that is there for us all the time. Jesus saw baptism as the launching pad for his ministry."¹ After his baptism, Jesus began his ministry that God called him to do. Likewise, after we're baptized or after we confirm our faith, if we were baptized as infants, we step out into the ministry God calls us to do, as changed followers of Christ seeking to spread the

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26aXO-7L0Gg&t=24s>.

good news and the light of Christ to all we meet.

Baptism has many meanings, and they can change for us over time as we continue to learn and grow in wisdom. Next Sunday, during Sunday LIFT, our intergenerational religious education program, we will talk about all the meanings understood by United Methodists, and we'll explore what baptism means to us personally. I invite you to join in the conversation and learning.

For me, right now, being adopted into the family of God is most meaningful for me. Many of you know that my father recently passed, and as part of our time off after Christmas, we traveled to Alabama for his burial. My mother passed away when I was nine, so now I feel like a 47-year-old orphan. Although, I have felt like an orphan many times throughout my life. I often felt that I lost my dad the day my mother died because he was so grief-stricken to lose the love of his life. He just pushed it down and never talked about it. It made him emotionally distant to me and my brother. He remarried and we carried on, but the family I knew, with the four of us, was forever gone.

I never felt at home in the new family that was created. I never felt I could be who I am. I never really felt accepted for whom God created me to be. There are many reasons why I have now made a home in California instead of Alabama. But it wasn't until I made a home in Christ, that I found my family again. When I walked into God's arms, when I walked through the door into God's presence, when I said, "Yes," to

Christ and to my call, God claimed me as his own and welcomed me into his family. Being in the family of God has given me meaning and purpose and love that I longed for, for so long.

God calls to each of us, by name. He created us. He formed us. He redeemed us. When we pass through the baptismal waters, he is with us. When we are drowning in the rising waters around us that life brings, God lifts us. When we walk through fire, we will not be burned. God saves us from being consumed by the flames. Because he is our God, and we are his.² We are all his, baptized brothers and sisters, in God's family.

This morning, during our closing song, we have the wonderful opportunity to remember our baptism. We remember the moment when we said "Yes" to God's gift of grace – whether that was at our baptism or confirmation. We reflect on what God's grace means to us, and what baptism means to us. During our closing song, I invite you to come forward down the center aisle and feel the nourishing waters. Whether you've been baptized or not, you can receive a blessing on your hand or forehead. This is your time to be with God, so you can also dip your hand into the water to remember the life-giving qualities this water represents.

Come, brothers and sisters in Christ. You are welcome in God's family.

² Paraphrased from Isaiah 43:1-3.