Today is the first Sunday after Epiphany. Traditionally it is also known as Baptism Sunday, in which the church celebrates not only the baptism of Christ, but we take the opportunity to remember our own. As each of you had received a piece of stone that was drawn out of the water earlier, it symbolizes us that we too have been drawn out of the living water, as we were baptized into Christ. Later on during our prayer time, we will have a moment of collective prayer to rededicate our own baptism, for those who have already been baptized.

This week, we begin a new liturgical season of Epiphany until the season of Lent begins in about a month. Just as the arrival of the Magi was an Epiphany moment for them, as we talked about last week, Christ’s baptism was also an Epiphany moment for him and for all of humanity as well. For the baptism of Christ marked the beginning of Jesus’s ministry here on earth. Through Christ’s baptism, God’s purpose and plan for humanity was revealed to ALL of humanity.

Often time people ask, *“Why did Jesus need to be baptized, if he’s already the Son of God and was without sins as we confess? Doesn’t his baptism imply that He had also sinned and needed repentance just like we do?”* Well, yes and no. First of all, the people had not been revealed yet that He was the Son of God, so he was just being seen as another Jewish man who just turned 30 years of age. They probably knew him as Jesus the carpenter Joseph’s son. So Jesus had kept a low profile and blended in with the rest of the people. He lined up just like anyone else as he **arrived at the River Jordan waiting to be baptized by John, not because he needed it, but because he wanted to set an example for all of us**, just like he washed the feet of his disciples later on. He demonstrated that he was one of us, even though He was fully God and fully human. Christ’s baptism was one of a few events mentioned in all four of the gospels. However, each of them placed slightly different emphasis or perspective on the event. If you ever get a chance, I highly recommend getting one of these Synoptic Gospel Parallels. They outline the various gospel narratives line by line and you can get a fuller picture of the story and not just hearing from one of the gospel narratives. You kind of seeing and reading the event in four dimensions, yet consistent with one another. But for our text today and for our lectionary year, we will be focusing on what is recording according to the Gospel of Luke.

One thing we notice that throughout the Gospel of Luke, the writer placed particular emphasis on the **commonality of Christ with the rest of humanity. Jesus was just like one of us.** Keep in mind though that this doesn’t mean that we’re at the same level of Christ or we’re lowering the status of Christ, but it’s just that he’s portrayed as more “personable”, more “down to earth”, and relatable to the common folks. That’s the running theme throughout the Gospel of Luke as you’ll notice in many of the passages that we’ll come across this year.

Luke described Jesus also had to stand in line and waited patiently with the rest of the people for John to be baptized. In fact, **Luke even described him being baptized AFTER “ALL the [other] people had already been baptized**.” So, he was the last, but certainly not least to be baptized by John on that day. Jesus didn’t get any special executive privileges, a private ceremony, or an express lane.

Luke described upon entering into the water, “*the Holy Spirit descended upon him in a form of a dove.* The heaven opened up and a voice came down declaring *“****this is my beloved Son****, with whom I am well pleased.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

Christ’s baptism was a public proclamation and **a revelation of God’s love for God’s one and only begotten Son and for the rest of us.** Our eyes were illuminated and focused upon the Holy Spirit that was descended upon us. This was a rare occurrence where all three members of the Trinity - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were present at the same place and the same time.

Jesus’s Epiphany moment signified the beginning of his earthly ministry. No longer was He the son of Joseph the carpenter, He was now charged to embark on a higher calling in fulfilling God’s mission here on earth. ***“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”* This was God’s affirmation of LOVE not only to his son and to ALL of us as well.**

In the same way, through our own baptism, **we too have been called by God as the “Beloved Son” and the “Beloved Daughter.” We are being sent out into the world** just as Jesus was, to engage in the world’s happening and to carry out God’s plan here on earth. If you notice, immediately right after the baptism scene in this chapter, Luke illustrated to us the genealogy of Jesus….at the way back to Adam. That seems a rather odd place for it, don’t you think?

I think the writer of Luke purposely did that to illustrate to us that there is **a direct correlation between one’s baptism and one’s ancestral lineage.** Both signified the beginning of a new life, a new beginning, and in this case the launching point of Jesus’s public ministry.

Jesus’s genealogy also demonstrated that although Jesus was without sin of his own, by the virtue of his earthly birth, he bore the consequences of the sins of his forefathers. Therefore His earthly baptism was made necessary to remit the sins of his forefathers. The same way the cross that he bore was OUR cross to bear.

As one theologian commented that ***“Jesus was born from, as well as into, a world of systemic sin, his baptism was a sign that he understood the full implication of his own incarnation.”[[2]](#footnote-2)*** Much weight was placed upon his shoulder, for He carried the heavy sins of humanity for the generations of the past and those who are yet to come. In the same way, when we confess our sins individually or collectively as a body, we confess not only our own sins but the sins of those around us as well. *For all [of us] have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory*.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Through our passage today, we noticed that Luke placed emphasis upon the importance of **prayer** and our **relationship** with the Heavenly Father. V.21 tells us that Jesus was in the middle of his prayer, when suddenly the sky opened up and a heavenly voice came down and declared Jesus as God’s Beloved Son, whom He was well-pleased**. Jesus was in prayer, in deep conversation with God, before launching on the next phase of his earthly ministry.**

Come to think of it, how often do we seek to do likewise as Christ did, seeking God’s counsel through prayers before we make important decisions concerning ourselves or relevant to the ministry that are entrusted with under care. Once again, Jesus was setting us an example to emulate, that **we are to be in constant communication and in steps with God through our prayers!** ***Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.[[4]](#footnote-4)***

**Furthermore, our baptism is not a personal initiative of ourselves, but rather a response to God’s divine grace in our lives.** God was making a public statement declaring we are no longer our own but we belong to God. This is God’s way of saying “**I LOVE YOU! You are mine and I am yours.**” What is mine is now yours and what is yours is now mine.

Another way of looking at the significance of Christ’s baptism is that Jesus was given a “send-off” by God to launch his earthly ministry. The “send-off” gift that Jesus received came in the form of the Holy Spirit. God the Father reassured Jesus that **He was not going to be alone.** The Holy Spirit would guide him through any trials, challenges, and temptations that he would face in life. Immediately right after his baptism, Jesus was taken into the wilderness to be tested by Satan.

In the same way, when we are being baptized, we too are being commissioned or “sent-off” into the world to embark on God’s ministry. We are being assured that we will never go alone. We WILL be taken out in the wilderness through our daily trials and temptations of life. We WILL hit a few bumps along the road. But rest assured that the Holy Spirit will go before us and will protect us from any harms and dangers that may come along the way, because we are God’s beloved sons and daughters.

In the Old Testament passage that we read earlier, the prophet Isaiah assured us that God has made claim on us in our lives and we ultimately belong to God. Therefore, ***“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine****”,* says the Lord. ***“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.”[[5]](#footnote-5)* What a comforting and reassuring thought that we are embraced by God!**

As we remember and rededicate our own baptism, we declare once again that we’ve been **drawn out of the water** and are now being **sent into the world** to proclaim God’s presence in this world.

This is a profound and yet powerful statement for us to make and for others around us to hear. Through this new season of Epiphany, may we seek to enlighten the world through the light of Christ, just as the Magi returned back to their homeland through a different route and to seek a new adventure. This is where the real work begins. **Are YOU ready and up for the challenge?**

May we embrace in God’s perfect will and purpose in our lives, through our faithful response in baptism and dedication of our lives, as we extend our thanksgiving and proclaim the Heavenly glory to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Matthew 3:17* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hess, Carol Lakey, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 4,* P.238 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Romans 3:23* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Proverbs 3:5-6* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Isaiah 43:1-2* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)