As we read earlier, our *Call to Worship* this morning took us on a journey through the water since the time of creation. The earth was described as being *a formless void* covered with *darkness. The only thing that was there was the wind (or the Spirit or the breath) of God and water….and plenty of it, both above and below.[[1]](#footnote-1)* The earth was filled with chaos and turbulence. There was no light, there was no land, no vegetation, no animal, and no human yet of course. The Spirit of God was hovering over water. But God was about to create something out of nothing!!!

Water plays integral parts throughout the course of our human existence. Without water, life simply would not be sustainable. Water is a powerful agent of transformation and cleansing. This same water that gave us life can also take away life, as evident by the Great Flood. It **liberated the Israelites from the bondage and oppression of slavery out of Egypt** and provided a passageway towards freedom and God’s promises. It quenched our thirst as it sprouted through the rock in the desert. It **baptized us and nurtured us into a new beginning and with a new hope**.

But the water that I would like us all to focus on this morning is the **water that gives us new life and that humbles us and cleanses us through our baptism.** Our baptism signifies the beginning of one’s life-long journey with God. And when it’s time, God will call us from this earth, as we complete our baptism and fulfill our journey of life. We acknowledge our frailty as human and at times we stumble and fall short and fail to live up to God’s expectation in our thoughts and in our actions. We have failed, from time to time, through our relationships with God and with one another. And we come full-circle to seek God’s grace and forgiveness in God’s presence.

As we read in our Gospel lesson earlier from *Matthew*, Jesus approached the River Jordan asking John to baptize him. Although this may not seem significant at the time, because I’m sure many people came to John for baptism each day…and Jesus was just one of them. But **this was a momentous occasion in so many levels**. When John saw his cousin approaching the river, immediately he knew that the moment has arrived for him **to step aside and become less, to make way for Christ to rise and become great.** John had fulfilled his earthly mission, as Christ was about to begin his. John knew that he was NOT the Messiah, but the One who is greater than he is to come.

As John proclaimed to those who came seeking their baptism, **“*I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will******baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.[[2]](#footnote-2)***

Upon Jesus’s baptism, the heavens opened up and Spirit of God descended like a dove and a light was shined upon God’s beloved Son, as a voice came down from heaven declaring, ***“This is my Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*** What a powerfulway to begin your public ministry affirming the true identity of who Christ was – as God’s Beloved Son.

This was an Epiphany moment for Jesus and for the rest of humanity. For the first time, the true identity of Jesus was publicly revealed, as all three persons of the Trinity were present – the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Mary and Joseph had cherished this in their hearts for so long, but now, it’s out in the open. It’s not a secret anymore. “***This is my Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*  This was Christ’s inauguration of his earthly ministry. And likewise through OUR own baptism, we come to experience and bear witness to this divine relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as well!**

When it comes to baptism, we often have this misconception that it marks the completion of our faith journey. We can check off another life’s spiritual milestone off the list, whereas it’s quite the opposite, it is just the beginning! Some churches do require the individuals who are getting baptized to undergo a year-long catechism classes, when they would be examined at the end to see whether one is ready to be baptized or not.

Furthermore, this community of faith (the Church) carries a critical responsibility of not only nurturing those who have already been baptized, but leading others who have NOT, towards their commitment in Christ. This is everyone’s role and responsibility within the body of Christ. It’s what we have signed up for.

So why do we need to be baptized? Isn’t that just more of a formality…well, yes and no! The public ceremonial aspect of our baptism demonstrates our commitment to Christ in our hearts. But more importantly, our baptism commissions us to live, to bear witness of, and to serve as disciple of Christ. **This is our calling upon God’s mission for humanity.** As one theologian puts it so well that, ***“being baptized finds its purpose in what follows - a calling to God's way of doing things in a world that often resists, but is always changed by those who seek to walk God's path.”[[3]](#footnote-3)*** We bear the marks of our baptism throughout our lives and how we may transpire God’s love to others, just as one of our hymns suggests that “they will know that we are Christians by our love”.

Friends, by the virtue of our common baptism with Christ, we are invited to embark on this very same mission alongside with Christ. When John saw Jesus coming down to the river requesting to be baptized, John knew it was time for him to step aside and pass the torch onto someone else. He did so graciously and with humility. The Spirit of Grace and Humility was at work for both John and for Jesus, at Jesus’s baptismal event. And I’ll explain what I mean by this…

Through the Spirit of Grace and Humility, John was willing to step aside and let Jesus take over God’s earthly mission. In the same way, Christ carried his humility to come to John for His own baptism. One might ask, why did Jesus need to be baptized, if he was already the Son of God, doesn’t that qualify Him already?

This was a very humbling gesture on Jesus’s part…for him to do what he did, by coming to the water and be baptized by John. It may not seem that big of a deal at the time, but it was!  **The Son of God exercised his humility by becoming one of us, through the way of a lowly manger, be baptized by John like everyone else, and eventually being convicted of a crime that he did not commit, and to be hung on a cross alongside two criminals.**  How low and humiliating can it gets? He did not come by the means of rules and power or being born in the royal palace. Yet he was obedient and was willing to do what God the Father had sent him to do…through his spirit of humility.

This was an important reminder for all of us as well during this season of Epiphany. How does bearing Christ’s humility look like in our lives today? Do we see ourselves being better than the others? Do we carry a sense of entitlement and certain privileges, while exerting authority, power, and influence above the others? **As disciples of Christ, all of us are called to serve God together, playing our respective roles, in glorifying God through our trials and challenges. Because the less we are, the more Christ is! The Spirit of Grace and Humility will not disappoint us.**

Friends, during this turbulent, chaotic, and uncertain time that we live in, may we find the peace of Christ that surpasses all of our human understanding…By the water and THROUGH the water of our baptism.

**This is what the season of Epiphany all about, as we pursue God’s hope and promise that has been placed upon our hearts.** We trust that God will continue to direct us and lead us as echoed through Christ’s baptism in us, *“YOU are my child, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”* Thanks be to God. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Genesis 1:2* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Matthew 3:11* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Singh, Jennifer Peterson <http://www.d365.org/todaysdevotion/> 1/8/14 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)