As I mentioned earlier, today is the first Sunday after Epiphany. Traditionally the church commemorates the baptism of the Lord today, even though the date was probably not exact, kind of like Christmas when we celebrate his birth. Nevertheless, it’s not the date that’s important, but the occasion. As the arrival of the Wisemen marked an Epiphany moment for them, Christ’s baptism was also an Epiphany moment for us all. Jesus’ baptism signified the official launching of his public ministry here on earth, but more importantly, **it was a sign and a revelation of his new identity, as well his new role in the story of OUR human salvation.**

Through Christ’s baptism, God’s purpose and plan for all of humanity were revealed. **The Father had unveiled his Son’s “Spirit Animal” as the heavenly dove descended upon him when he came to be baptized by John.**

Both the dove and the water played a significant role throughout the Old and the New Testament. They represented signs of God’s covenant as promised and fulfilled through the flood that destroyed and also re-created new life and a new beginning. As described in the Genesis account of the great flood AND in our Luke passage today, *“the windows of the heavens were opened”[[1]](#footnote-1)* as if God has something important to declare to the people, and we better pay attention and listen. Some people might ask, *“Why did Jesus need to be baptized, wasn’t he already the Son of God and that he was perfect and without sins? Or did his baptism imply that He too had sinned and needed repentance just like we do?”* Well, yes and no. The rite of baptism is a public declaration of one’s faith and allegiance. It is both personal and also public at the same time. It is definitely NOT an act of “going through the motion”. It is both powerful and spiritual.

Jesus came to Jordan wanting to be baptized by John, not because he needed it, but because he wanted to set an example for all of us. Jesus demonstrated that he was also one of us, even though He was fully God and fully human.

Christ’s baptism was one of a few events that were mentioned in all four of the gospel narratives. However, each of them placed slightly different emphasis or perspective on the same event. In our reading today, Luke placed particular emphasis on the **commonality of Christ with the rest of humanity.** He was just like one of us.His baptism made us more relatable with him. He was just like one of us.

In fact, **Luke even described him being baptized AFTER “ALL the [other] people had already been baptized**.” And that says a lot about who Jesus was as he exemplified himself with his humility. He was the last, but certainly not the least to be baptized by John on that day. This came as no surprise as he would later on preach and teach about the last shall be first and the first shall be last. Jesus stood in line among all the others patiently waiting for his turn to be baptized. He didn’t exercise his special privileges and skip the line knowing who he was. He knew that his renewed mission was in God’s hand. Furthermore, Jesus’ baptism was a communal affair, not a private one. There were plenty of human witnesses to testify this momentous occasion, as well as the company of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit all converged in the same place and at the same time.

No longer was he the carpenter, he had now been commissioned to take on a higher calling in fulfilling God’s mission here on earth. ***“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased,”*** says the voice from heaven. 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 also being sent out into the world** to engage and to bear witness in the world’s happening and to carry out God’s mission here on earth. Interestingly, if we were to keep reading onto verses 23-28, the gospel writer illustrated to us the genealogy of Jesus…tracing all the way back to Adam. That spanned 62 generations and about 4,000 years. This was significant also because it portrayed the humanity of Jesus by making the connection with the 1st human – Adam. As you know Jesus had also been referred to as the 2nd Adam by the Apostle Paul in the New Testament.[[2]](#footnote-2)  So there’s yet another parallel between the prophecy of the Old Testament and the gospel of the New Testament once again.

Luke intentionally delineated the **connection between one’s baptism and one’s ancestral lineage.** Both signified new life and a new beginning. Jesus’ Spirit Animal (the dove) revealed about his personality and who he was as a person, as well as what he was about to do for humanity. **The heavenly dove represented the purity and the peace that Christ brings into our society that is often in turmoil and corrupted with sins.**

As one theologian wrote ***“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.”[[3]](#footnote-3)*** Much weight was placed upon his shoulder, for He carried the heavy burden of our sins for the generations of the past and those who are yet to come. He was the “perfect” man who fulfill the mission that may seem impossible for humankind.

In the same way, when we confess our sins individually or corporately as a community, we lift up not only our own sins but the sins of others around us, including those who might have done us wrongs. **We pray for those whom we need to forgive, just as Jesus intercedes and prays for us and free willingly forgives us.** *For all [of us] have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory*.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Furthermore, through our passage today, Luke emphasized 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**.** Jesus was in deep conversation with God, before launching on the next phase of his earthly ministry.

Once again, Jesus set himself as an example for us to emulate, that **we are to be in strides with God through our constant prayers! Through the conviction of our prayers, the Holy Spirit transforms us and shapes us into the persons God has intended us to be.** We shall seek God’s counsel through our prayers through little things and big things. **Prayers affect all things and the Holy Spirit will be right there with us** through our every trials, challenges, and temptations.

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!**

Throughout this season of Epiphany and the new year ahead of us, may we seek to enlighten and illuminate the world through the light of Christ, just as the Magi returned back to their homelands by another way while seeking new adventure and exploring new opportunities to witness the coming of the Lord.

May the word of God’s ultimate love, ***“You are my child, whom I love, with you I am well pleased”*** inspire us to share God’s love with others. For **“*there is one body and one Spirit, just as we were called to the one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.[[6]](#footnote-6)***

Go in peace with the Spirit of the heavenly dove! Thanks be to God. In the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Genesis 7:11, Luke 3:21* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *1 Corinthians 15:45-49* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hess, Carol Lakey, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 4,* P.238 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Romans 3:23* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Isaiah 43:1-2* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Ephesians 4:4-6* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)