

The Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, 8 January 2012  
Saint James Episcopal Church, Tigard OR  
The Rev'd Raggs Ragan, Rector

Sometimes our liturgical calendar is a bit confusing. Last Sunday was the Feast of the Holy Name, recalling Jesus' circumcision and naming on the eighth day; Friday was the Feast of the Epiphany commemorating the visit of the Magi to the Holy Child – and today we are celebrating his baptism by John in the Jordan, the beginning of his adult ministry. So we have moved 30 years in just two days!

Christmas is over but we are still celebrating. This wonderful celebration moves us abruptly from Christmas into contemplation of Jesus' ministry. And his ministry, like ours, begins with baptism. When Jesus comes up out of the water in today's Gospel the Spirit descends upon him and he is proclaimed God's son, the beloved. Just as every baby, child, and adult who is baptized is proclaimed a beloved child of God.

We say that we are baptized into Jesus' baptism, that by our baptism we share in Christ's whole saving life and death on our behalf. It is a wondrous and exciting thing to be made part of the Body of Christ.

When we baptize Connor and Lauren and Nicolas, we will declare them to be part of the family of God, part of our family. Marked as Christ's own forever, they are forever part of us and we of them. In baptism we are bound to one another and to God, we are given a job to do and a family with whom to do it. We don't know what will come in our individual or community lives, but we do know that we are committed to one another, to go through the future together.

Whenever we welcome new people to be baptized, we all renew our baptismal vows, reminding ourselves that we are all part of this wonderful family of God – and what that means for our lives.

The renewal of vows begins with statements about believing – and the sense of that word 'believe' in these statements is 'trust', specifically 'entrusting our hearts to [someone]'. So, we entrust our hearts to God, who brought us into life in love and calls us to live in love. We do this in Trinitarian form, true to the experience of the Church through the millennia. We entrust our hearts to the Father, creator and source of all that is. We entrust our hearts to the Son, the Christ, beloved of the Father, who showed what it means to be truly human and who forged a path for us through death to a whole new kind of life. We entrust our hearts to the Spirit, God holding us in being, sustaining all life.

Then, having reminded ourselves of who holds our hearts, we make promises. We promise to continue to live and worship in community, to learn how to live as Children of God, as part of this loving family, feasting and praying together.

We promise to pursue lives of love and service, knowing that we will sometimes fail, but that forgiveness is always possible.

We promise to be loving servants, to do our part to show forth the love of Christ to the whole world.

We promise to live up to Jesus' command to love everyone, as we strive for justice and peace for all.

We promise to 'respect the dignity of every human being', aspiring to be conformed to God who loves everyone into being and sustains everyone in being.

Then when we welcome the newly baptized we invite them to share with us in Christ's eternal priesthood – that is to join us in blessing the world, the calling of the people of God since the days of Abraham.

It is good that we have the opportunity to renew these vows every year on this feast and on Easter and Pentecost and Saint James and All Saints – that we thus remind ourselves of what it means to be a baptized person, part of the Church, part of Christ's body, the hands and feet and voices of Christ, wherever life may take us.

Two of our regular baptismal services each year, this one and the feast of Saint James in July, also include the adoption of new members. Like most of us, Heather and Bob have already been baptized. They are already part of God's family, of Christ's body serving and blessing the world. So they do not need to be baptized.

But they are being officially adopted by Saint James. This means that they have decided to make this particular community, this local segment of the family of God, their own. They have decided to publicly declare their desire to live as part of our local family, to be part of our life of prayer and service and mutual support. After they make that declaration we promise to include them, to pray for and support them, to embrace them as true member of this church family, concluding by saying, "We welcome you in the Name of Christ and offer you our prayers, our support, and our friendship."

This is a lovely celebration, an opportunity to express our gratitude that we are part of such a loving and joyful community. Because it is a joyful occasion, it usually includes laughter. That is why it seemed appropriate to add to our liturgy the delightful song from *Oliver* that we sing to the newly adopted (as long as the celebrant does not forget!) This joined our liturgy last

year. I had included the text in the Vestry Retreat and the Vestry had the idea to include it in our adoption liturgies, as it so well expresses the welcoming spirit of Saint James, and what we are meaning to say to those we adopt. It does not matter whether the people being adopted have been coming for a long time before they commit to adoption or move into adoption right away, the sentiment is still the same.

We sing, “Consider yourself at home. Consider yourself one of the family.” This is a wonderful sentiment, similar to the lovely Spanish expression, “Estás en tu casa.” “You are in your own house”, sometimes expressed in the less traditional “Mi casa es tu casa.” Whatever words we use, we are saying, “This is your place now and we are your people.”

We continue singing, “We've taken to you so strong. It's clear - we're - going to get along.” This of course does not mean that we will never disagree, that there will never be differences of opinion, or even hurt feelings. It does mean that when we disagree we will persevere in relationship. We will not give up on each other.

“Consider yourself well in. Consider yourself part of the furniture.” That is one of my favorite lines – part of the furniture. You belong here. Even if you just come to sit and pray, and it's one of those days when you don't even want to speak to anyone else, you still belong. You are now part of Saint James, and Saint James will not be itself without you.

“There isn't a lot to spare. - Who cares? - What ever we've got we share!” That is the essence of community, that sharing, sharing of resources, of friendship, of prayer, of support, of knowledge and exploration – as well as of joy and sorrow, of triumph and tragedy. We declare that our lives are linked, that we will be there with and for one another, whatever happens.

“If it should chance to be - We should see - Some harder days - Empty larder days - Why grouse? - Always a chance we'll meet - Somebody - To foot the bill - Then the drinks are on the house! - Consider yourself our mate. - We don't want to have no fuss, - For after some consideration, we can state... - Consider yourself - One of us!” That is the essence of adoption, “Consider yourself one of us.”

So today we remember that remarkable day two thousand years ago when Jesus went down into the water with his cousin John and came up to be greeted as the Beloved. And as we contemplate that amazing moment, of public declaration of God come among us, we welcome Connor and Lauren and Nicolas into the family of people who share that baptism and that loving relationship with God, and we welcome Bob and Heather into this particular part of that family, bringing God's love to this corner of God's creation. This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.