

**Sunday Sermon**  
**January 13, 2019**  
**Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**  
**“In You I Am Well Pleased”**

Introduction

I love this Sunday, the Sunday we celebrate baptism. I find myself wanting to take the baptismal bowl and walk up and down the aisles, flinging water in all directions, saying, “Baptism! Baptism for everyone!”

When the thermometer started to drop and the weather started to threaten, I was reminded of a time in Western Europe when there was bitter cold, and a newspaper reporter called a cathedral in Cologne, Germany to interview the priest about how they were coping. “It’s zero degrees in here,” the priest told the reporter, “and the holy water keeps freezing.”

I remember thinking maybe they should add antifreeze to their holy water. I wonder, have you have experienced times in your life when you felt like your holy baptismal waters needed to be thawed? That is what this Sunday is about.

I

Do you remember your baptism? Maybe you do, if you were old enough when you were baptized. Maybe not, if you were baptized as an infant. Maybe you have heard stories, seen pictures, saved mementos.

Or maybe you have not yet been baptized. I hope that in this sanctuary on Sunday mornings there are individuals gathered from all points of the journey, baptized and not yet baptized.

What does baptism mean to you? That question is for each of us here, even those who have not yet received the sacrament. Because no matter who you are, you have a baptism. You are God’s child. God has chosen you, touched you, claimed you.

So today when I say “Remember your baptism and give thanks,” I am not talking about the event of your baptism. I am saying “Remember that you have a baptism, and give thanks.”

Our youngest son, Kres, was 2 years old when he was baptized. After his baptism I took him to the church nursery. He looked at the teacher with a face of bewilderment and said, “My dad and mom just put water on my head. Why did they put water on my head in church?” We would spend the rest of his years growing to adulthood teaching him in various ways why we put water on his head in church.

At whatever age our baptisms come, as infants or two year olds or adolescents or adults, we do not understand it completely. It takes a lifetime to learn what our baptism means.

## II

There are three gospel descriptions of the baptism of Jesus, Matthew, Mark and Luke. John, the fourth gospel, has an indirect reference, but not an account. Of the three accounts, Luke's, the one we heard today, is the most understated. In Luke, the baptism of Jesus is not the main event but merely a dependent clause taking only one third of a single verse. "Now when all the people were baptized, and Jesus also had been baptized," . . . And that is it.

Does that not feel a little disappointing, that the baptism of Jesus should be more dramatic than that? It sounds like there is a line of people with John down at the Jordan River being baptized. And along comes Jesus, he gets in line, and John says, "Next."

But then comes what is important in Luke's account. Luke says after Jesus is baptized, while he is praying, the heavens break open and the Spirit descends in bodily form like a dove, and a voice from heaven says "You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased."

Note Jesus is a young man here, at the beginning of adulthood, before he has begun his ministry, even before his struggle in the desert with his identity and what type of Messiah he should be. And the Father is already saying, "I am well pleased with you."

When we baptized our older son, Will, who has severe mental disabilities and a degenerative disease, a relative asked, "Why did you baptize Will? He will never be presented for church membership. He will never be able to confirm his faith. He will never come to an understanding of what baptism means."

"We baptized Will," I said, "because in that moment, when we held him up, called out his name and put water on his head, God said, 'This is my son, with whom I am well pleased.'"

Do you realize that if you have been baptized when the water dripped down off your head, that same pronouncement was made upon you? Do you understand that God has passed the same judgment on you that God passed on God's own son? "You are my child, and with you I am well pleased."

## III

Martin Luther, the great church reformer, struggled with anxiety, guilt and depression. Whenever he found himself ready to give up, whenever

worry for his own life and the life of the church he loved overwhelmed him, it is said that he would touch his forehead and say to himself: "Remember Martin, you have been baptized."

"Let us draw strength and comfort from our baptism when our sins or conscience oppress us," Luther said, "and we must cry out, "But I am baptized! And if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body."

Baptism does not occur just once. Every day God renews in us what was begun in our baptism. Whether we are baptized at six days, six weeks, six months, six years or sixty years, every day we live out our baptismal vows. Every day until our funeral comes, and the officiating minister says, "For our brother or for our sister, his or her baptism is now complete."

## Conclusion

It takes a lifetime to learn all that it means to be baptized. So every year on this Sunday we come back to the font to take another step toward understanding why someone put water on our heads in church.

We come back, because baptism is rebirth. Over and over we are being reborn as we are walk wet with the waters from the font. We live out our baptismal vows, and God renews in us what was pronounced in our baptism.

As you place your shell into the water today, remember that God's proclamation, that same declaration that was placed on Jesus has been placed on you, "You are my child, my beloved. With you I am well pleased."

You have been chosen, sealed by the Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever.

Today: "Remember your baptism and give thanks."