

Epiphany 1C
 January 10, 2016
 Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose
 Isaiah 43:1-7
 Acts 8:14-17
 Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Today we commemorate Jesus' baptism: And in the context of his baptism, we should look at its meaning for you and for me. There are at least four different baptisms described in our Gospel lesson today. First there was the existing ceremonial baptism, which was used for Jewish purification, and for preparation of people wanting to convert to Judaism. John changed that baptism to be one that Scripture describes as a 'baptism of repentance,' which means that its purpose was to signify the commitment of the baptized to change the course of their lives to be ready for the arrival of God in a new way in their lives.

The next baptism is of Jesus. He submitted to John's baptism, but John and Jesus both knew that he did not need to repent of anything. The real baptism of Jesus was after he came up out of the waters of the Jordan River, and received the proclamation by God that he was God's beloved Son, and then he received the Holy Spirit.

THAT baptism was a baptism of empowerment by the Holy Spirit, and a commissioning of Jesus to fulfill the vocation he had been given through his incarnation. This was the ultimate 'epiphany' event; "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

As an aside, the baptism of Jesus is the only place in all of Scripture that all three persons of the Trinity are clearly present together: The voice of the Father, the Dove of the Holy Spirit, and the incarnate Son in the waters of the Jordan River.

Baptism by the HS (AFTER the baptism by John) commissioned and empowered Jesus to do God's will. Before Jesus' baptism, we don't know very much about his life, but we do have clues from scripture that he studied scripture, he prayed, he spent time learning from other people, he probably worked with his step-father as a carpenter, he worked on discerning God's calling, and at age 30 he stepped out to answer his calling.

Jesus' baptism exploded into a fire within him to step out and change the direction of his life, and the direction of humanity.

Jesus transformed John's baptism for repentance into a baptism for commissioning and an empowerment to accomplish God's work. It seems that Jesus' baptism brought him to an epiphany moment of stepping across the border land from human upbringing to his being the divine teacher, model to follow, and Savior for us to worship as our Lord.

As believers in Jesus Christ, you and I have been called to Christ's baptism; not the Jewish baptism, or even John's baptism. We have been commissioned and empowered to do God's work. A major responsibility we have as a faith community is to get trained and to help each other in doing God's work. After our own baptism, we need to recognize the borderland where we Christians live, between the physical world and God's world;

between being ‘of’ the world and being ‘in’ the world; between being humans with a spirit in us, or being spiritual beings in a human body.

This baptismal calling is about who we worship, but it is also about what we do the rest of the time...

We can see our Christian responsibility as one of balancing three ‘tensions’ in our lives. The first ‘tension’ is between being disciples and being apostles. Being a disciple means to be a student. But that does not mean living in a classroom. Our study includes Bible study, but it means turning academics into action. Being an apostle means to be a messenger. We need to be both disciples and apostles, requiring learning, then taking that into our families and jobs, making known that we are motivated in what we do because of our commitment to Jesus Christ, then coming back to reflect, share, encourage, learn more, and then taking our new learning out to families and our jobs again; and again; and again.

One important insight for me is to remember the meaning of ‘parish’, not in our present context, but in the English parish concept. In that context, we are responsible to serve every single person within the geography of our ‘parish’. How well do we understand and serve the needs of those people?

The second ‘tension’ in our baptismal empowerment is between managing and learning. Canon Jesus Reyes put that balance in these terms: Is the purpose of the church – the church? Or is the purpose of the church – the Kingdom of God? How do we monitor and balance our purpose as a church?

The third ‘tension’ in our baptismal empowerment is between emotional tension and creative tension. There are energies of fear, or loyalty to the past, or ego, or passion for what we are doing now; there can be those energies working inside us that can drive our actions or in-actions; these energies can keep us safe, but they can also stifle creative thought. Our job as Christians is the Great Commission; to go out and make new disciples. How do we Anglicans do that in a way that fits our personality and is comfortable and real for us? We need to discuss and answer those questions.

When Jesus stepped forward to be baptized by John, he committed himself to the path God had chosen for him. And God responded. You and I are called to do the same thing with our life: to commit ourselves to the path God has chosen for us to follow. It’s our choice. It’s always our choice. And what draws us to respond is the knowledge that God loves us, Jesus stands beside us, and the Holy Spirit empowers and inspires us, to do things we never imagined possible. You and I have an exciting year ahead of us, filled with personal epiphanies and community epiphanies, looking for God being revealed in new places, and in new ways.

May our Lord God bless us with the power to accomplish every good thing that He wants of us. Amen.