

January 10, 2021
Baptism of Jesus of Our Lord



Baptism of Our Lord by Gloria Ssali

“In the ritual of Baptism, our ancestors acted out the bizarre truth of the Christian identity: We are people who stand totally exposed before evil and death and declare them powerless against love. There’s nothing normal about that.” - **Rachel Held Evans**

“Living in the present moment is the recurring Baptism of the soul, forever purifying every new day with a new you.” - **Alaric Hutchinson**

“Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion.”- **Brennan Manning**

“Love yourself. Then forget it. Then, love the world.” - **Mary Oliver**

ORDER OF WORSHIP

PRELUDE: “Child of Blessing, Child of Promise” by Christian F. Witt;
Patty Meyer, piano

WELCOME

Good morning and welcome! My name is Elisa Lucozzi and I am pastor to the beloved community that is Guilford Community Church. We're so glad you have joined us this morning for our service remembering and celebrating the Baptism of Jesus.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Not too late for Star Words

Warning for Special Meeting

A word about online worship: Although we really miss being together in person, we continue to gather online because we love and care about our congregation and our community, because we want to maintain physical distancing in a way that helps us to feel connected but also keeps us all safe. Although it is hard to be physically distant from one another, we also know that it can't keep our hearts from connecting and we know it is indeed the best way of caring for one another right now. Let us keep creating new ways of being church because we know that being church has nothing to do with a building and everything to do with loving each other. Let us gather to be the church in a new way with a welcome wide enough for all.

So, as we begin today let us acknowledge and honor this land we occupy by honoring and acknowledging those First Nation people to whom this land belongs:

We gather here on the bank of the Broad Brook
In the shadow of the great Mount Wantastiquet
In the valley of the rushing Connecticut
to worship and discern together the call of God
to the United Church of Christ for these days,
let us know that we do so on the hunting grounds
and homelands of the Mahican and Penacook people,
as well as the southernmost members of the Abenaki
Tribe.

These people used this land since time immemorial
and are still among us in the present.

We offer them our gratitude and respect,
Our repentance and hope in solidarity with them...
It is a Holy Communion we share of life on earth,
of past and present, of pain and reconciliation,

of mystery and majesty...let us begin.

SILENT MEDITATION and THE LIGHTING OF CANDLES

CALL TO WORSHIP by Teri Peterson

Listen up! God is calling.

Not just in the usual ways, but in the news, and the background music, and the silence.

Wherever you are: at home, at work, at school, at play... whether those are all the same place or if they require careful planning to reach, listen.

Hear this reminder: God calls us, every one, to imitate Christ's life.

Not just pretty words, not just for special people, not just in the perfect circumstances - the Spirit's voice leads us to action.

We long to encounter the Living Word, in the sanctuary of our hearts and in the streets of our community.

Come, let us worship, and hear, and be transformed.

OPENING HYMN: #281 "Spirit of the Living God" by David Iverson, 1926; *GCC Virtual Choir*

Spirit of the Living God

Spir - it of the liv - ing God, fall a - fresh on me; Spir - it of the

The first system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 4/4 time signature. It contains a melody with eighth and quarter notes, including a repeat sign. The lower staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature, providing a harmonic accompaniment with chords and eighth notes.

liv - ing God, fall a - fresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me,

The second system continues the melody and accompaniment. The upper staff features a repeat sign and a key signature change to two flats (Bb and Eb) in the final measure. The lower staff continues with a steady accompaniment.

use me. Spir - it of the liv - ing God, fall a - fresh on me.

The third system concludes the piece. The upper staff ends with a double bar line and a key signature change to two flats. The lower staff provides a final accompaniment with a whole note chord at the end.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION/OPENING PRAYER

“When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.
I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly and bow often.
Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, “Stay awhile.”
The light flows from their branches.
And they call again, “It’s simple,” they say,
“and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine.” - Mary Oliver

PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

People of God, we desire to be refreshed, renewed and changed.
Let us listen again to God calling our names
to encourage us and strengthen our resolve
to be God’s people in faithfulness and peace-loving justice.

“Confession” by Teri Peterson

Life-giving God, you draw us to streams of faith
and yet we draw back from drinking
for fear of facing the truth.

Forgive us.

You call us to rivers of renewal,
and yet we will not bathe
for fear of commitment.

Forgive us.

You shower us with a flood of blessings,
yet we shield ourselves from them
for fear we need to change.

Forgive us.

Forgive us our timidity, O God.
Encourage us to face our flaws and failings
and find faith overflowing.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Friends, God hears our prayers and sets before us the way of Jesus.
God calls us and gives us enough grace and mercy to follow the way.
Hear the words of our creator,
spoken through the prophet Isaiah:
“I have called you by name.
You are mine. Do not fear,
for I have redeemed you.”

CHILDREN’S STORY: “Hello, Hello” by Brendan Wetzel

PRAYER FOR THE CHILDREN

SCRIPTURE READING: *Elly Majonen*

Isaiah 43:1-7

But now thus says the LORD, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

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.

For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life.

Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you;

I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth--

everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

Mark 1:4-11

⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his

sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE Hymn:#617 **“Write These Words in Our Hearts ...”**

HYMN: “Down by the Jordan” text by Carolyn Winfrey; music by Erneuertn Gesangbuch, Stralsund, 1665; harmony from “The Chorale Book for England”, 1863; *GCC Virtual Choir, Peter Amidon piano*

SERMON “Be Loved”

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, loving and gracious God.

I was brought up in a traditional Italian Catholic family in the early 1970s. My family and I were very involved in our church, and I spent most of my early teenage years singing in the church choir and teaching religious education classes to kindergarteners.

My teenage exploration around relationships and the unearthing of my true sexual identity awakened the realization for me that I would be shunned from my church family and the place I had called my Spiritual home. In order to preempt the pain of that rejection, I left the church, even though it had become such an important part of my life. During my high school years, I found a new community through my involvement in the school’s performing arts department.

I spent nearly 10 years disconnected from any church, although not from my own sense of Spirituality. My Spiritual journey led me to some less conventional but powerful methods of prayer, including drumming and dance. Then, in 1999, I landed at Episcopal Divinity School as an employee.

One of the great benefits of my employment there was that I could take 2 classes per semester free of charge. There was a lot of buzz on campus about a class called “The Life of Prayer”, and so having my curiosity peeked, and figuring it would be good for me to get a sense of what the students there experience. I enrolled. The structure of the class was such that we would be introduced to a different modality of prayer every week and then engage with that modality while keeping a journal - simple, yet unbelievably profound.

It was during one week where we were engaged in *lectio divina*, a contemplative way of reading the Bible, that I was reintroduced to this morning’s passage from Isaiah. It was in that experience of hearing those words that I was called home.

It was one of those moments that some of us in ministry refer to as a “call moment”, a time when we feel a palpable sense that God has called us to ordained ministry.

It was in this moment that all the messages about being unworthy of God’s love, these interpretations of Scripture that had told me I was not a child of God, that I was an abomination, were swept away. Through the words of Isaiah, I found that my experience of being marginalized was actually a call to minister to others who feel excluded from society and from God’s grace.

These words of the prophet Isaiah, written originally as words of hope to the exiled Judeans, doesn’t come off as a prophet but more as a Sufi mystic. Most of the time, prophets talk about difficult things to come, or the ways in which we must amend our behavior in order to enter the kingdom of God. But not this Isaiah - this happy Isaiah who I imagine more like cupid spinning words of love, delivering a love letter from God.

The community this passage was written for had experienced the utter destruction of their city, carnage, displacement and unbearable loss - loss of homeland, loss of temple, loss of neighbors and family members, loss of identity, loss of trust in God.

Yet again, the Scriptures speak to us of then and of now. I feel a deep kinship with these ancient people, in the losses they had experienced, in the losses we have experienced: loss of our places of worship, loss of neighbors, family and friends because of COVID, and certainly loss of physical connection, and yes, perhaps even a loss of trust in God. It is exactly the right time to hear these words from Isaiah again.

One of the phrases that most stood out for me while praying with this Scripture is “you are mine”. I have to laugh at myself because in most contexts if I heard that phrase, my immediate reaction would be something indignant like “you don’t own me!”

It’s about belonging, and somewhere inside of me belonging had become bad - perhaps because there were so many places I didn’t feel like I belonged after I discovered the truth of who I am.

I still held that childish notion, that material notion of what belonging meant – like a child snatching away a toy from a curious friend – “it’s mine!” or the long litany of things we own and claim as if we were trying to rack up points in some kind of game – my car, my house, my clothes, mine, mine, mine!

It wasn’t until I heard these words wrapped in light, a message from God, that I could hear them with new ears and that I could know again that I did belong. It was through this passage from Isaiah that I was reminded about another part of my identity, my identity as a beloved of God.

This week we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus - one of three traditional focal points for Epiphany through which Jesus' identity "shows forth" (the other two being the visit of the Magi and Jesus turning water into wine during the Wedding at Cana). What is Baptism anyway? Where did it come from? During Advent, we traditionally hear the story of John, who appears in the wilderness preaching a Gospel of repentance, [Matthew 3:2](#). The Greek word for "repentance" here is *metanoia*, from *meta*, "change," and *noia*, "mind". Today, we would say "change of heart" or "change of life", a shift and reorientation.

The Gospel story of Jesus' Baptism ends with another short but sweet love letter from God to God's own son and to us, too. If we go back to the Gospel text and look at what is said to Jesus, it gives us a hint as to what else Baptism could mean: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." God claims Jesus as God's own son, not only revealing who He is, but also who He is called to be. And so, with us too, when we are Baptized or remember our Baptism.

In the liturgy of Baptism, the guardians, mentors or parents, are asked "By what name do you wish or do you wish this child to be called?" I think God named us all the same name - **Beloved**.

Beloved: a word I use every week when I talk about this congregation. It is both the truth of who we are and also the hope of who we are becoming. In order to help others know their own beloved-ness, we must first claim our own - love your neighbor as yourself.

There is a responsibility that comes with being "beloved". **BE LOVED**. The first part of that is to recognize and accept that you are loved unconditionally by God. God called you beloved and claimed that you are "very good".

Here's the thing: in order to fulfill the other part of the responsibility that comes with being "beloved", you actually have to start to believe all of this first, because the other part is even more difficult. That is to **be love** - be love in the world.

It might sound easy but it isn't. We live in a world where most of us are constantly bombarded with messages that tell us we're not enough - not smart enough, not thin enough, not rich enough, not fast enough. On and on and on.

What would it be like to truly hear God's message to us, accept it, believe it and begin to live into it?

So, this morning, remember you have been Baptized. Yes, even if you haven't had a pastor pour water over your head, you have been claimed and called. Claimed as Jesus was as God's own and called like Jesus was to lift up the oppressed, care for the poor and sick, feed the hungry, and cloth the naked.

I invite us to renew our Baptismal vows and claim our belonging, our beloved-ness and our blessedness. Let it wash over you. Let it be the buoyancy that holds you up when the waters of life are choppy and turbulent.

Come immerse yourself, if not in water than in love, and let “the water wash away everything but the chance to begin again.” Come and hear the voice of the one who splits the heavens wide open say to us: “You are my beloved. In you, I am well pleased.” Amen.

ANTHEM: “Take Me to the Water” traditional African American spiritual;
arr. Peter Amidon; *GCC Virtual Choir, Zara Bode soloist, Peter Amidon, piano*

RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL VOWS: Remembering Our Beloved-ness

Our God created new life forms and brought them up from the waters of chaos, embraced them, and called them good.

Jesus, Baptized in the river Jordan by John the Baptist,
became living water for us and embraces all of us.

Jesus embraces those who are poor, oppressed, marginalized
and all others who come seeking.

We follow Jesus with our Baptism,
marking a starting place for new life and new ways of being.

We join Jesus in love and service.

Send your Holy Spirit to bless this simple bowl of water that it may become a
sacred sign of your love for us and of our call.

Let us prepare our hearts and minds to see, feel, and hear again the vows of
Baptism.

RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL VOWS - from “Book of Worship,UCC”

Do you renew and affirm the promises made at your Baptism?

I do.

Do you recognize the call of God to be God’s people always?

I do.

Do you embrace the way of Jesus in faith and ministry?

I do

Do you accept the nurture of the Holy Spirit who renews your spirit each day?

I do.

Do you accept and embrace others who seek a liberating faith in God?

I do.

In renewing your Baptismal vows, remember your Baptism as a mark of acceptance and welcome into the care of Christ’s church where you may begin again your Christian faith and life.

Bless yourself with water and say these words: “(Your own name), you are God’s beloved in whom God is well pleased.”

UNISON PRAYER

O God, we rejoice in your grace, given and received.
We thank you that you claim us,
that you wash us, strengthen us, and guide us,
that you empower us to live a life worthy of our calling.
In the way of Jesus, make us as water in a dry and thirsty world.
Establish us to be places of refreshment.
Root us and nurture us in love,
that with all your people, that we may rightly and justly serve you.
Fill us with your fullness
that our lives may overflow in service and love. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: "Beloved is Where We Begin" by Jan Richardson
Beloved.

Is there any other word
needs saying,
any other blessing
could compare
with this name,
this knowing?

Beloved.

Comes like a mercy
to the ear that has never
heard it.

Comes like a river
to the body that has never
seen such grace.

Beloved.

Comes holy
to the heart
aching to be new.

Comes healing
to the soul
wanting to begin
again.

Beloved.

Keep saying it
and though it may
sound strange at first,
watch how it becomes
part of you,
how it becomes you,
as if you never
could have known yourself
anything else,

as if you could ever
have been other
than this:
Beloved.

ANTHEM: “How Could Anyone Ever Tell You” by Libby Roderick; arranged by Peter Amidon; *GCC Virtual Choir*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE *Elizabeth Tannenbaum and Peter Falion*

This is the time in our service where I invite your prayers - prayers of concern or sorrow, prayers of celebration and joy. If you have something or someone you would like our gathering to pray for, you can type it into the comments section that accompanies this live feed.

By Stephen Fearing at <http://www.stephenmfearing.com/liturgy/prayers-of-the-people-baptism-of-the-lord>

Baptismal God, your grace springs forth creation's song;
in the beginning, your spirit moved over the water's surface;
during the flood, water carried Noah's family to safety and creation was reborn;
on water, Moses floated down the river to bring your people home;
through water, the Israelites were led and the Egyptians were defeated;
from water Jesus made wine at the wedding party,
over water Jesus walked and calmed the chaotic tempest.

We remember how your Son, our Savior,
walked to the river to meet your prophet John,
how he was Baptized with all of them, and all of us,
how the heavens opened up, and the Spirit descended,
and your happiness was showered upon all who were there.
We give you thanks that you find happiness in us,
for why else would you send your Son to show us the way?
We give you thanks that your Son was Baptized with us,
that through his Baptisms you remind us that we, too, are beloved.

Gracious God,
surely you know that there are still many within your fold
that cry out for the fulfillment of Baptismal promises...
for those who feel grief and sadness...
for those who did not go home for Christmas...
for those shivering on a cold winter's night...
for those who, like you, were born into poverty...
for those who seek employment...
for those who have lost employment...
for those dealing with chronic pain...
for all those who are struggling with illnesses - chronic illness, mental illness

or addiction.

for all the precious souls lost to COVID – each one someone’s heart....
for all those who are sick from COVID, those healing at home or who are
fighting for their lives in hospitals around the country and the world...
for all those who have died because of the color of their skin...

Remind us, God with whom we are Baptized,
that our Baptisms seal us to go out and serve those who need your Grace.
Help us to remember that our Baptisms are sufficient for our calling.
Help us to remember that our Baptisms are not merely a Kodak moment,
a Hallmark card memory of nostalgia and cuteness,
but that each Baptism is the beginning of faith’s formation,
a journey that both begins and ends with death and resurrection.
Keep us strong, keep us faithful,
lead us beside still waters,
that we might abide with You and You in us.

Now let us say together the prayer that Jesus taught us, using whatever words
help us to embody its promise. May we bring about one small glimpse of the
(kingdom) of God, a kin-dom where all are well, all are fed and free, where all
are whole, where all know love, where *all* are beloved.

Let us pray: Our Father, (Our Father/Mother, Our Creator) who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom (kin-dom) come, thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our
trespasses, as we forgive those who trespasses against us and lead us not into
temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom (kin-dom) and the
power and the glory now and forever. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: Hymn #278

“Hear our Prayer, Oh Lord...”

THE OFFERTORY

CALL TO OFFERING

Just as the waters of the earth are abundant and full of life,
so are the Blessings God pours upon us daily.
Let us now joyfully offer our tithes, pledges, and offerings
with the hope that they may enable others to feel immersed in God’s love.

Supporting the church and the mission of the church is more important than
ever. You can still send in your weekly offerings to the church via US mail 38
Church Dr. Guilford, VT 05301 or consider using our online "offering plate" by
going to the church’s website and clicking the PayPal donation button on the
home page. So now let us gather up all these offerings as well as the offering of
our time and talents and dedicate them to continuing the work of our still
speaking God.

DOXOLOGY
PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Faithful God,
Bless us in our Baptismal calling
to be in ministry of showing hospitality to others.
We offer the gifts that we have been given to be used
not for conquest and dominance,
but for use in liberating the poor and hurting people
who pray for our liberation as well as their own.
Receive and multiply our gifts for life-giving ministry. Amen.

THE CLOSING HYMN: #237 “How Firm a Foundation” words from Rippon's
"Selection of Hymns from the Best Authors", 1787; music from early American
melody; *GCC Virtual Choir, Peter Amidon piano*

How Firm a Foundation

237

1. How firm a foun - da - tion, O saints of the Lord,
 2. "Fear not, I am with you, O be not dis - mayed,
 3. When through the deep wa - ters I call you to go,
 4. "When through fier - y tri - als your path - way shall lie,
 5. "The souls that on Je - sus have leaned for re - pose

is laid for your faith in God's ex - cel - lent word!
 for I am your God, and will still give you aid;
 the riv - ers of woe ov - er you shall not flow;
 my grace, all suf - fi - cient, shall be your sup - ply:
 I will not, I will not de - sert to their foes;

What more can God say than to you has been said,
 I'll strength - en you, help you, and cause you to stand,
 for I will be near you, your trou - bles to bless,
 the flame shall not hurt you; I on - ly de - sign
 those souls, though all hell should en - deav - or to shake,

to you who for ref - uge to Je - sus have fled?
 up - held by my right - eous, om - nip - o - tent hand.
 and sanc - ti - fy to you your deep - est dis - tress.
 your dross to con - sume and your gold to re - fine.
 I'll nev - er, no, nev - er, no, nev - er for - sake!"

BENEDICTION

Thank you, God, for Blessing us with memories of Jesus' Baptism and ours.
Thank you for removing our reluctance, doubt, and fears,
for replacing them with courage and commission.
We go forth with your calling, direction, and Blessing. Amen.

THREEFOLD AMEN: Hymn #291

POSTLUDE: "If Anybody Asks You Who I Am" Georgia Spiritual; *Patty Meyer*,
piano

For Further Prayer and Reflection:

[Lauren Daigle - You Say - 49th Annual GMA Dove Awards](#)

[Tracy Chapman - I'm Ready](#)

[Alvin Ailey Dance Theater 2020 performance of Wade in the Water](#)

More about Lectio Divina

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