

The 1st Sunday after the Epiphany: Holy Trinity Church: January 9, 2022

Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22

**You are my Son, you are my daughter, you are my child whom I love; with
you I am well pleased.” AMEN.**

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!

According to the Gospel of Luke, John the Baptist was baptizing people on the banks of the Jordan River. Then Luke makes one of the most startling pronouncements in the New Testament. He writes, “*When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.*” Each year on the First Sunday after Epiphany, liturgical churches celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. For us, it is a major event. The Son of God submits to being baptized at the hands of a somewhat eccentric preacher called John the Baptist.

Mark describes John as wearing clothes of camel's hair, living on locust and wild honey making his home in the wilderness. John admits that he is not

worthy to carry Jesus' sandals (Mt. 3:11). In fact, he seeks to deter Jesus from being baptized at his unworthy hands. And yet Jesus comes to John to be baptized.

It is a remarkable scene. He who was without sin submits himself to a religious rite that most of us associate with the symbolic act of washing sin away. The rite of baptism is so important to our identity as Christians that it is required in one form or another of all who would become part of the body of Christ. And notice what happens next, after Jesus' baptism. Luke writes, "And as he was praying heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'"

You have heard or read those words many times. It is a most familiar scene. But have you noticed those words coming immediately after Jesus' baptism—"And as he was praying . . ."? is it not entirely natural that Jesus, immediately following his baptism, should pray? Prayer played a major role in his entire ministry. Here he was, the very manifestation of God on earth, and yet he felt the need to be in continuous communication with his Father. Contrast his example with the practice of many of us. We have a very limited acquaintance with the Father, yet we spend only a nominal amount of time in prayer.

My dear sisters and brothers, I know that there are many good things that you do. I wonder, are you so busy doing all those good things, that you have lost the habit of praying. Have you made time to formerly spend talking with God each day or has the crowded full of the other things squelches your talk with God. That has happened to many of us! We are so busy that we have crowded out the one necessary practice for a truly successful life. Jesus never let that happen. Immediately after he was baptized, Jesus was praying, and what happened next? Luke tells us, “The heavens opened.” What an exciting statement. When good people pray, good things happen. “The heavens opened.”

Some of you will remember the name, Sister Elizabeth Kenny. You will recognize her name primarily because, as a self-trained nurse in the Australian bush country in the first half of the twentieth century, Sister Kenny developed a new and successful approach for treating victims of a disease that crippled many young people back then called, polio. Her method, which was bitterly contested at the time within the medical community, differed from the conventional medical practices of the time. The conventional practice, referred to as “splinting,” called for placing affected limbs in plaster casts, a practice that was not only quite uncomfortable, but ineffective as well. Instead of putting polio sufferers in plaster casts, Sister

Kenny applied hot compresses to the affected parts of her patients' bodies followed by passive movement of those areas to reduce what she called "Spasm." So, how did she happen on this humane treatment before science gave us vaccines for this dread disease? Well, one day Sister Kenny was called to the bedside of a seven-year-old girl who lived there in the Australian bush country. The girl had extreme pain, a high fever, and the muscles of her leg and foot were contracted. Sister Kenny did not recognize the symptoms, so she dispatched a rider on horseback to a telegraph station twenty miles away to get expert advice over the telegraph wires. Finally, the reply came back, "The symptoms you describe indicate infantile paralysis. There is no known cure. Do the best you can."

Out of necessity Sister Kenny devised the unique program of treatment for this dread disease that has already been described. Did it work? It did. Later, when she received the recognition she deserved for her discovery, Sister Kenny was asked, "What did you do first?" referring to her medical procedure. "Did you tear up a blanket for the hot packs?" "No," Sister Kenny replied. "The first thing I did was kneel down and say a prayer."

So, my sisters and brothers, what happens when we pray? I believe, heaven opens. When good people pray, good things happen. In Sister Kenny's case

she happened on a new therapy for hundreds of thousands of God's suffering children. When Jesus prayed on the day he was baptized, heaven opened.

Then we read, “. . . and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” What a beautiful scene: “Heaven opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. “And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”

In the north of England, they have been digging coal for over a century. The miners digging the coal go miles and miles away from the central shaft, so there is always danger of the men getting lost. On one day, two miners did lose their way out of the mine. Their lights finally went out, and they were in danger of losing their lives. After wandering around in the darkness for a long time, they sat down, and one of them said: “Let us sit perfectly still and see if we can feel the way in which the air is moving because it always moves toward the shaft.” There they sat for a long time, when suddenly one of them felt a slight touch of air on his cheek. Up he sprung to his feet, exclaiming, “I felt it!” They went in the direction in which the air was moving and reached the central shaft and freedom from their dark captivity. The Hebrew word for Spirit [*ruach*] is also the word for wind or breath. In a very real way, we also

need to feel the movement of the air, do we not? We need to experience the movement of the wind of God's Spirit in our life.

I want put it this way: "As children lost in the woods are fearful of the sinister darkness and then, suddenly, hearing a sound from the somber blackness, a familiar voice, a loving, seeking, helping voice, their mother's voice so prayer is our reply to the voice from the Word of God in Jesus Christ which suddenly cries out to us in the mysterious, dark universe. It is the Father calling us out of the world's darkness. God calls us, seeks us, wants to bring us to Himself. 'Where are you, my child?' Our prayer means, 'Here I am, Father. I was afraid until you called. Since you have spoken, I am afraid no longer. Come, I am waiting for you, take me, lead me by the hand through the dark, terrifying world.'"

What happens when we pray? The heaven opens. The wind of God's Spirit blows. And we become new people. That's the wonderful promise of Christian baptism. We can have new life in Christ Jesus,

This is a story about a machinist who was employed with the Ford motor company in Detroit who had, over a period of years, "borrowed" various parts and tools from the company which he had not bothered to return. While this practice was not condoned, it was more or less, accepted by management

at Ford, and nothing was done about it. The machinist, however, experienced a Christian conversion. He was baptized and became a devout believer. Even more importantly, he took his baptism seriously.

The very next morning, he arrived at work loaded down with tools and all the parts he had “taken” from the company during the years. He explained the situation to his foreman and added that he’d never really meant to steal them and hoped he would be forgiven. The foreman was so astonished and impressed by his action that he cabled Mr. Ford himself, who was visiting a European plant, and explained the entire event in detail. Immediately Ford cabled back: “Dam up the Detroit River,” he said, “And baptize the entire city!” We could only hope that every Christian takes his or her baptism that seriously.

When Jesus prayed on the day he was baptized, the heaven opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” Something like that should happen at some time in our life. Baptism at its best should result in our becoming a new person. We should become aware of our identity as a part of the family of God. We should discover that we, too, are children of God.

I read a story of the late Reverend Dr. John Claypool, an outstanding author and Episcopal priest, once told a moving story that came out of World War I. At the end of that terrible conflict the government of France was faced with an unusual problem. In their army hospitals were over one hundred soldiers who had developed total amnesia caused by battle trauma. These men could not remember their names, their families, their hometowns. They were totally separated from their origins. Finally, the government announced to the whole nation that all families who had relatives missing in action should come to a certain hospital on an appointed day. For this occasion, a large platform was erected. With the families gathered around the platform, the soldiers were led out one by one in the hope that somebody would recognize them, and they could be reunited with their loved ones.

Here is the challenge for this week, Sunday, of the 1st Sunday Epiphany. I want you to think about your prayer life. When do you pray? Why do you pray? How do you pray? Do you pray in the morning thanking God for awaking you to another day of life? Just think about this! Can you imagine the relief and joy those soldiers experienced when they were reunited with their loved ones and thereby rediscovered their identity? My sisters and brothers, that's the sort of thing that can happen in our lives when we are in the habit of maintaining continuous contact with God through prayer. When

Jesus prayed on the day he was baptized, the heaven opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, you are my daughter, you are my child whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” As for me, I love all of you and you are my beloved flock , AMEN!