



# *Congregational Church of Burlington*

Established 1774

January 2020

## **Pastor's Message**

On the first Sunday after Epiphany, the Church helps us remember Jesus' baptism by giving us an account of it from one of the New Testament Gospels.

Along with crowds of his fellow Jews, Jesus goes out into the wilderness to hear an ascetic prophet named John call people to repentance and to offer them the means to turn their lives around through the religious rite or act of baptism.

Why would Jesus have gone out to John with all the others?

Was he simply curious about the man they called John the Baptist whom the people believed was like their prophets of old?

Did Jesus know something that even John didn't know, namely that he was the one John was preparing his people for?

Why would Jesus have gone out to hear John preach about repentance and baptism when according to Church tradition Jesus was sinless and had no need to repent, yet was baptized and sealed in the act of repentance?

Was it merely, as some have suggested, that Jesus wanted to show his solidarity with all his fellow human beings and their need to turn away from their sin and turn back to God?

These questions aren't answered in the Gospel accounts of Jesus baptism. What is clear is that when Jesus is baptized by John, he experiences himself as God's beloved Son.

When John immerses Jesus in the water and lifts him up out of it, Jesus hears either in a literal voice from Heaven or an internal voice saying, "You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Whether or not this simply affirmed what Jesus always knew or was something he just learned we can't know as it is not answered in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' baptism either. But we can surmise that from the moment of Jesus baptism he found blessed assurance that he was God's beloved Son.



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One of the reasons the Church has us remember Jesus' baptism is that it causes us to remember our own. According to Church tradition, Martin Luther had these words prominently placed in his office: "Remember your baptism."

In a similar reference it once was said, "Every time you wash your face, remember your baptism." Of course, unless we were raised in the Baptist tradition (as I was) or in some other tradition that practiced what is known as "believers' baptism", we would not have been able to literally remember our baptisms.

If we were baptized at all, it would have been as an infant long before we were old enough to remember the actual events of our baptisms. Outside of what our parents or others who witnessed our baptism shared with us, we are left to figuratively remember our baptisms and the meaning they have for us.

It is hard for us to imagine Martin Luther, who we now know as one of the world's great priests, theologians and authors, needing to be reminded that he was a beloved child of God. Yet throughout his life, this great man of faith was plagued by doubts and insecurities to the point he neither felt beloved or like a child of God.

Church authorities criticized him, labeled him a heretic and even sought to put him to death for the reforms he sought to institute. Maybe this was one of the reasons Luther had the words "remember you are baptized" placed in a prominent place in his office; to remind himself that in his baptism he had been claimed by God as one of God's beloved sons. A fact that was sealed forever in the waters of baptism.

Like Martin Luther, many of us struggle with who we are called to be. Regardless of how strong our faith is we experience periods of great doubt. If we are fortunate along the way, we meet people who encourage us to discover who we are called to be or they allow us to be who we are while in their presence. If we are truly fortunate, we meet people who affirm us, love us and make us feel beloved.

Regardless of who these people are, whether they be parents, siblings, friends or teachers, we'll meet Someone even better at our baptisms...the same Someone Jesus met at his baptism: his God and our God!



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And at that moment early in our infancy, a voice spoke that we were not old enough to understand or reply to. A voice spoken through the minister or priest who baptized us saying: "You are my beloved son or daughter in whom I am well pleased." It is this blessing from God that is given to us in our baptism that remains with us throughout our lives.

I don't know what you have on the walls of your study, if you have one. Nor do I know what words you have on your refrigerator that imparts wisdom to you each day, but none are more worthy or wiser than the words:

**"Remember your baptism."**

May it be so,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Wendell M. Taylor".

Wendell M. Taylor, Pastor