

Baptism of our Lord
Luke 3:15-22

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

The season of Christmas is officially over now as we enter the season of Epiphany. But I miss Christmas. My house looks dark where for over a month we had outside lights lighting the bushes and the back fence, now it is just dark. The days are still short; the bills from Christmas spending are starting to come in the mail; fevers, sore throats, and sneezing seems to be passed around and around again; disappointments over the holidays and resolutions are already setting in, tax reminders and W-2 tell us how much we don't get back, my goodness January is a drab kind of month all around. When we combine all of these and other pressures, anxieties, and struggles—no wonder people sometimes feel a tad down-in-the-dumps or depressed around this time of year. Sometimes we can feel as if we are all alone and forgotten, out on our own, struggling to just get by and make it to another day.

Well, guess what? We're in good company! That's exactly how the Israelites felt too, when they were living in captivity in Babylonian. They had fallen from God and suffered from their enemies because of it. They had turned from God and did their own thing and were destroyed. And now the remnants of the people cry out in their captivity. They were down-in-the-dumps; they were depressed; they were living in a foreign land as a defeated people. Their hopes and dreams of the future had all but dried up and disappeared. But then, out of their crying prayers; out of their hurts, pains, struggles and anxieties comes a wonderful, upbeat message of Good News from God. The prophet delivers a message to them that is charged with God's love and hope; restoration and deliverance; affirmation and acceptance.

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine....For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.... you are precious in my eyes, and honored and I love you..."

What a fantastic message! One that is upbeat and full of hope. A message that clarifies who God is, the loving parent, the creator, the Lord God Almighty. And it declares who the people are and most importantly whose they are, his created, his own beloved, who he has named and knows. Further more did you happen to notice that the one do the moving, the one that is first to act, the initiator of all this message of hope is God, not humans? God comes to Israel in one of their most depressed, vulnerable moments. God comes when they feel down and out and at their lowest. God comes to pick them up again; to

remind them of their true identity and worth. God comes and acts in a beautiful, loving, affirming way. God assures them that they have not been forgotten; they are indeed very special to Him; they belong to Him; they are loved by Him and shall be restored and delivered out of their exile by Him. He comes to them like a loving parent running to help a hurt child. He comes to bear them up in his loving arms and assure them that everything will be okay. What a wonderful message of hope and love!

In another time and place someone told a story of a very old and very special organ:

You see a rich, very successful collector of musical instruments had bought this old one of a kind organ. It wasn't like any he had seen before, the chambers, wires and pipes were all laid out differently and the wood work was beyond description, all hand carved and magnificent in its day, a true of a kind piece. But now it was dilapidated, banged up and hardly played at all any more. So he called in experts from all over the world, hoping they could restore it.

When they had finished the organ looked like new. The little hand carved wooden angels so carefully embellishing the chests were shiny and clean; the ornamental carved leaves had smooth curves and corners were renewed, the pipes shone like they were new. The botchy varnish was gone and replaced with the beautiful sheen that lifted up the beauty of the wood. It looked tremendous.

The only problem was that the insides were still sitting in boxes on the floor. The experts couldn't figure out how this organ worked. The owner continued to advertise for experts to come and fix and restore his organ with the promise of great reward. But one after another would come and try no one could do it.

One day a little wheezy, half-blind old man knocked on the door. The Butler upon answering the door and laughed at the old man saying, "What makes you think you can fix it? We've had experts here from all over the world."

But the owner overheard the discussion and answered saying that it couldn't hurt to try. So the stranger set out to work. After several days, he had the organ operating like new. When asked how he could do this, he simply shrugged his shoulders and replied, "I made it."

I made it... "I created you... I have redeemed you... I have called you by name... I love you... you are mine..." That's the word of hope for the people and for even us today. Because those words from Isaiah still describe what God is doing for each of us today. That's our true source of hope and deliverance now and in the future. As the maker of the

organ could best fix and restore and give new life to the organ because he made it; so, too, God who made each one of us is the only one who can truly fix, restore and give new life to each one of us. It doesn't matter how down-in-the-dumps we may feel; God can and does and will lift us up and deliver us from all of our forms of exile and hurts.

That's the message of Christ's baptism and our baptism. We are a very special people because we've been baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our baptismal covenant is what gives us the assurance of God's true identity and our true identity. We are precious; we belong to God; we are one with Christ and therefore our calling and purpose; our whole life is bound to be lived out in the service of Christ and his Church.

In our baptism, God has called you by name and given you a ministry, bestowed on you a mission. We are the baptized members of the priesthood of all believers. We, each one of us is a person important to the loving Father, who has made us and claimed us and redeems us through Jesus Christ. He has called you by name and marked you as his own in the waters of baptism. He has Called you to be his people, his servants, his ministers of love and grace in all that you do.

May we live in that baptism covenant, remembering that God is the one who has made you and sets you in this place to do the work he has for each of you. May God guide you and may you answer that promise made in your baptism to live in the gifts of the Spirit, with the freedom of redemption, and the promise of God's love now and always. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come.
AMEN.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

O Heavenly Father, you have made us and called us by name, through the waters of baptism, we are made your children - forever a part of your eternal family. You surround us in your loving arms and grant us hope washing away all fears and troubles to grant us

peace. We give you thanks for this great gift of glory, and continue to shine the light of your Word upon us and fill us with your Holy Spirit.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer..

Eternal Lord, you have created and loved this world, And yet we have fallen from your ways. The world is filled with wars and violence, disease and disasters, hatred and greed, adultery and temptations. Grant us the Spirit of your wisdom Lord, to lift up your ways in all that we do, to overcome war and instill peace in this world, to comfort and heal those hurt by diseases and disasters, to overcome moral ills and find ways of love that you would have us do. Send your Spirit into this world to mend all places of hurt and despair this day.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer.

Lord, you have called us in baptism and made us your own. You have claimed us and called us your beloved. Lift us up this day to all fulfill your calling to be minister witnessing to your grace and love. Guide us in sharing your word, to tell others of your salvation and promise, to spread the truth of your everlasting joy. Be with our newest members Bob and Cecelia Sell and all those gathered here as we renew our baptismal vows, to be in worship, to learn more about you, to pray and receive your sacrament, and to witness to all the world. Send us forth from here today as your people, as your instruments prepared and equipped to spread your Glory in Word and Deed to our community and beyond.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Almighty God, you are the healer of all those in need. You have formed your people and called them from the four corners of the earth, you stretch out your saving hand to all those who are lost. And we pray that you continue to save those who have lost their way, who are filled with sickness or hurt, laid low by afflictions of the mind or body. Grant healing and hope to all those in need this day and especially to hospitalized, our homebound and especially, .Howell Crawford, Crissie Redding Myers, Jim and Kim Bevins, Dan and Pam Keeney and all those we name now in our prayers to you...

Into your hands, o Lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.