



Baptism of Our Lord-January 10, 2021
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
Genesis 1: 1-5 and Mark 1:4-11

“Water and a Voice”

-Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ who was baptized for you. Amen

Christmas is again behind us and we begin another season of Epiphany. This is the season of the church year when we learn how Jesus who was born of a virgin at Christmas is revealed to you. Throughout all of these readings for today, the common thread that connects or reveals the Triune God to you is through his voice which breaks into the wilderness.

In the very beginning, in the Creation story from Genesis, there was a wilderness. Wildernesses do not all appear the same way for everyone. Your home may be a safe haven for you, but for others it is a place to fear. Some students love going to school and enjoy learning and the close friendships that develop there, while others might find school to be the loneliest of all places to be. The workplace can be an energizing experience for some, but for others it can be exhausting and discouraging. The wilderness described in creation and the wilderness that John the Baptist appeared in did not look the same either. In the beginning there was void and darkness including being void of people. The wilderness that John the Baptist appeared in likely was a desert region, but it was filled with people. What makes a wilderness a wilderness is always the same, it when the voice of God is not heard. It is when God is silent, and you are left wondering what God thinks of you.

In the creation story it doesn't take long for the silence to be broken. The first two verses describe the wilderness scene and quickly by the third verse God speaks and the darkness of the wilderness is replaced with light. And when God sees what his voice has created, he is pleased. There is hardly any silence in the Psalm for today. Nearly every verse begins with the words, “The voice of the Lord” and it is his voice which is at work. In this Psalm, again there is a wilderness. But when the voice of the Lord is heard, it shakes the wilderness as described in verse 7, And when John the Baptist appears in the wilderness, he doesn't spend any time thinking about what to do, John the Baptist appears and immediately begins to preach a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Up to this day, he had been preparing the way for Jesus and proclaiming how a baptism from Jesus would be different from the baptisms that he had been performing. John the Baptist said, when Jesus arrives the baptism would be more than a temporary ritual washing of water.

On this day as soon as John mentioned the coming of Jesus, there he was. And the first order of business for Jesus was to be baptized by John. Matthew records how John the Baptist resisted baptizing Jesus and how Jesus rebuked him saying that he MUST be baptized. Indeed, this baptism was different from the baptisms that John was doing. As soon as Jesus came out of the water, we are told that he saw the heavens torn apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. But there was more than just water. There was the voice. The voice that removes any question of what God the Father thinks about you when you have been baptized in the

name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The voice that tears breaks into the wilderness of your life and creates faith just as it tore open the heavens and declared to Jesus, "You are my child, with you I am well pleased".

*I wonder if anyone else saw or heard what happened when Jesus was baptized. Scripture specifically says that **Jesus** saw the heavens opened and saw the spirit and he heard the voice of God. This is what happens in every baptism after Jesus was baptized. Water is necessary with a baptism from Jesus, but there also is a voice declaring God unchangeable favor for you.*

I was so pleased to be able to make a hospital visit this past Sunday. This visit also reminded me of the importance of the voice of God. I am thankful for chaplains who are still working in hospitals when pastor's visits have been restricted or prevented for nearly a year now. Chaplains are to be the voice of God for patients who may not have their own pastor come to visit them. But one of the surprising teachings we received in our Clinical Pastoral Education classes when we made visits in the hospital was, we were told to limit our speaking of God's word. We weren't even encouraged to bring our bibles with us when we made visits. We all understood that there is such a thing as the ministry of presence and it can be helpful for patients to know that they are not alone, but simply standing there without saying anything soon becomes uncomfortable for everyone in the room. We also understood that not everyone that we visited was open to or ready to hear from a preacher. But more often than not, it did not take long for patients after learning that you were a pastor to describe a wilderness in their life. Most of us ignored the practice that was recommended to us of being silent when making hospital visits knowing the comfort of hearing God's word shatter their wilderness and replace it with faith.

You do not need to wonder if your baptism was from John or from Jesus. From the second lesson from Acts it may sound as if there is still a possibility of two baptisms. The disciples that Paul found confessed that they had not received the Holy Spirit and that they had been baptized into John's baptism. This baptism was only water. Paul did not remain silent to leave them in their confusion or doubt. Paul did what John the baptist did and pointed them to believe in the one who came after him, Jesus Christ. These disciples had only received a ritual washing of water. This was no baptism at all. They had not heard God speak to them like God spoke to Jesus when he was baptized.

After these disciples heard this, they were not baptized again, but were baptized for the first time in the name of Jesus. And as soon as they were baptized, the Holy Spirit descended on them like when Jesus was baptized. These disciples were now equipped with the Holy Spirit and they began to be the voice of God to others.

God's voice has spoken to you today. He has revealed himself to you in his baptism. A baptism that is just water but is a baptism with a voice. A voice that does not keep silent but reminds you again today that you belong to God and it is God's good pleasure to protect you through every wilderness you encounter. Your baptism in Jesus forgives your sins, delivers you from the devil and gives you eternal life. Christ was baptized to take away not just your sins, but the sins of the world. John could not prevent Jesus from being baptized. No one could. Jesus had to be baptized. This is the reason he came into the world. It was for our sake God the Father made his son to be sin who knew no sin, that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Christ was baptized for you and in your baptism, you receive his favor. Amen

