

## Epiphany C/or The Baptism of Our Lord, Jan 9, 2022, XEC, Valdosta, GA

### Propers:

**Lections:** Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 89:1-29 (20-29); Acts 10:34-38; Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

### *Collect of the Day*

Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

### **Introduction**

1. William Bridges in his classic work on transition. cites Eliade: ". . . **for the archaic and traditional cultures, the symbolic return to chaos is indispensable to any new Creation.**"/4/

Then, he observes"

**"In this sense, chaos is not simply 'a mess.' Rather it is the primal state of pure energy to which the person (or an organization, society, or anything else in transition) must return for every true new beginning."**

[William Bridges, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes* 2d. ed (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2004), p. 141]

If that's true, then many of us are looking for new beginnings. We have more than our share of chaos. Christ Church certainly has had its chaos of late. Can you see any energy that has arisen in that chaos?

2. Jesus, in his baptism, was entering a time of chaos—leaving home and his private life for a public ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing. Leaving the security of being John's disciple to becoming a leader of his own followers.

3. Change can be thought of as what keeps altering in and around us—situational. Transition can be thought of as our response to change—psychological response to change. How do we deal with and live through change? At life's core are transitions, many of which we would not have chosen on our own.

### **I. The Baptism Speaks of Change and Transition**

1. Thomas Moore, the monk turned psychologist wrote, **(in baptism we show a) . . . willingness to step courageously into the river of**

**existence, instead of finding ways to remain safe, dry, and unaffected.**

[Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 243-44.]

Jesus' baptism is the end of his private life and the beginning of his public ministry. Jesus had been a follower of John the Baptist. Now, that ends and he launches his public ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing. Here, in a moment of initiation, Jesus affirms his identify with sinful humankind and he accepts the divine call to servanthood and sonship.

2. Many of us don't recall our baptism, because we were infants. I recall mine at age 9 but didn't understand much about it. We revisit our baptism each time we renew our baptismal promises, as we do today. Living into those promises requires us to wade in the river of existence and leave the safety of the shore. And, that make us one with Jesus, who waded confidently into the river of existence.

3. How many of us find ourselves making transitions in response to change. Some changes come uninvited and unwelcomed. Job loss, divorce, etc. Some come as part of our growth and development—high school graduation, college graduation, retirement. I remember leaving home for college and looking back at the water tower as it disappeared in the trees and hearing a voice, "You will never be back." College was change and I had to make the transition.

Dave's departure was a change that forced you to respond and live into the transition. The chaos of the interim period brought even more changes and chaos, a LOT of change forcing you into a lot of transitional behaviors. Add COVID to that and you get a lot of raw chaos and change that forces repeated transition and adaptation.

Some changes come about because we inwardly change and must transition our life situation to live honestly. That's at the heart of why I became an Episcopalian.

4. Gerhard von Rad has said:  
**"Christ commands us again and again to break camp and move on."**  
 [Gerhard von Rad, *Biblical Interpretation in Preaching*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), p. 124.

The challenge is in breaking camp. How do we become open to these transitions? How do we find our way through them? How do we experience transformation?

## **II. The Baptism Speaks of Response to Change and Transition**

1. Here, Jesus is praying. The Holy Spirit anoints him after prayer. A pattern for Luke. Acts 1:14 w/ Acts 2. Acts 4; Acts 13. So, how does Jesus receive the power to transition through this change and begin a new phase in his life? Through the Holy Spirit. See Luke 4:1.

Jesus is the model for us. As a true human being, he had to depend on the Spirit for everything. We pray for an anointing with the Holy Spirit when we are dancing around the chaos of a transitional moment in life. The Spirit awakens us to the need for transition, anoints us to so that we take courage and make that transition, and leads us through it to a new phase in our lives.

2. OK. That sounds great in theory. But, can you give me a bit more light here? First, barriers and challenges

[1] Resisting change. We don't like it. We fear the unknown. We want things to stay the way they were. Some initial anger and resentment and blaming may well happen, but we must get past that in order to have energy to be creative. Otherwise, we're clinging to the past and resenting and blaming people and circumstances that took it from us. Jesus could not go back to his old life as a follower of John and a skilled carpenter.

You cannot go back I have certain protocols that are rather common expectations among clergy and clergy spouses. As painful as it is, I do not communicate for a year. I do not attend worship without the permission of the rector, and I ask permission to socialize with former parishioners. Relationships with current clergy always take precedence—I have left. I do not want to be disruptive. It's painful, and I struggle with missing people I love, but it's for the good of the parish and their relationship with their current clergy.

[2] Fearing change. Am I able to deal with this? I've not been on this ground before. I don't know what to do.

Next, some positive steps

[1] Pray. Ask God for wisdom, light, and help—help with acceptance and help with the fear. Wisdom to know what to do next. If you're not good at this, consider writing God a letter. Also, consider writing yourself a letter, describing yourself as you would like to be at the end of this transition.

[2] Confide. Take someone into your confidence. Trust those closest to your life who are positive and with whom you feel comfortable.

[3] Small steps. I did not become an Episcopal priest overnight. I spent two years as a layperson with no thought of being a priest.

[4] Have a ritual of letting go.. I remember standing on a bridge over Bayou St. John in New Orleans after my divorce, dropping a symbol of my marriage into the water, burying the past.

### **Conclusion**

Remember Moore's words:

**244/ (in baptism we show a) . . . willingness to step courageously into the river of existence, instead of finding ways to remain safe, dry, and unaffected.**

1. What transition do you face at this moment? Identify the places of transition in your life. Invite those closest to you to pray and discern and share with you.
2. Dare you pray now for a fresh release of the Christ's power in your life. If you do, beware, the Spirit will enlighten you about transitions needed and will carry you through those moments into new, exciting larger places in your life. To pray in that way will empower you to turn loose and allow the Spirit to carry you like a river carries a canoe in its current. Trust the current. Let the chaos be a center of primal energy.

### **"A New Way of Struggling"**

**To struggle used to be  
To grab with both hands  
and shake  
and twist  
and turn  
and push  
and shove and not give in  
But wrest an answer from it all  
As Jacob did a blessing.**

**But there is another way  
to struggle with an issue, a question--**

**Simply to jump**

**off**

**into the abyss**

**and find ourselves**

**floating**

**falling**

**tumbling**

**being led**

**slowly and gently**

**but surely**

**to the answers God has for us--**

**to watch the answers unfold**

**before our eyes and still**

**to be a part of the unfolding.**

**But, oh! the trust**

**necessary for this new way!**

**Not to be always reaching out**

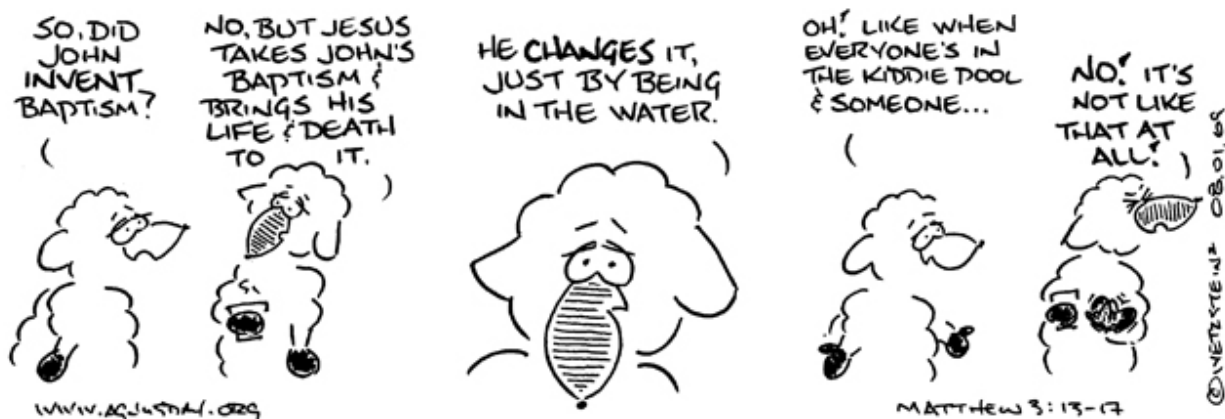
**For the old hand-holds.**

[Susan W. N. Ruach. Cited by Rueben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck,  
*A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1983), pp.  
331-332.]

(Revised fr/ Jan 13, 2013 Trinity EC, Asbury Park, NJ; Epiphany C/01 Jan 10, 2009  
All Souls)

(See Meditation # 1: Retreat for Community of Intercession Camp Hardtner,  
Louisiana, May 23, 1998 for the seed for this sermon.)

The Baptism of Our Lord: January 9, 2022  
 Luke 3:15-17, 21-22



Questions for Reflection

1. Luke does not actually say that John baptized Jesus, even though we know that he did. Why do you think Luke puts John so far in the background?
2. The baptism gave Jesus an epiphany (a manifestation, light) about his identity and mission. What epiphanies have you had about your identity and purpose in life?
3. How might you offer an epiphany of God's love for someone you know?
4. Jesus' baptism brought change into his life. What changes are requiring you to transition? How can you make God and your Christian community more a part of that transition?
5. How would your life differ if you dared live more fully into the promises in the baptismal covenant and in your baptism?