

Baptism of Our Lord, Year C, January 9, 2022 Luke 3:15-22
Epiphany, Winnipeg

I wonder if anyone really noticed. There's a crowd gathered to listen to John the Baptizer while he preaches. He tells them to repent; to turn around and change their ways of life to ways of generosity and compassion and caring and honesty. They've come to listen and they've come to be baptized, to be washed in the waters of a small slow-moving river, to have the dust and the grime of old habits and hurts washed away and to be set off refreshed, with a new start. And there's one man over there in the crowd— a thirtyish Jewish man – who looks like all the others and kind of blends in. There's no glow around his head, no smile that's warmer than everyone else's. He preached no sermons and taught no teaching that afternoon; he performed no healings. He hadn't done any of that yet. He's Jesus, and he's just there in the crowd. And when the crowd have all been baptized, and Jesus has been baptized too, he's praying, just like any devout Jewish man or woman might be in that situation.

I wonder whether anyone even noticed. Those people in that crowd had their own wonderings, and they asked the question deep inside whether John the Baptizer might be the Messiah; the one chosen by God to save the people and the nation from their enemies and their oppressors; to make the nation great again... For hundreds of years they have heard promises that their tears will be wiped away and grief will be turned into joy. They know about God's promises, and they've heard again and again that a new kind of world will take shape: people driven apart will be brought back together, there will be food and drink and a home for everyone, broken communities and nations will be healed. And they wonder whether John will be the one to do all this. But John says "No, there's someone greater than me coming along." But does anyone even notice that that 'someone greater' John is

talking about is there, just blending in with the crowd? Does John even know? Does the preacher even know?

If they didn't know, it's not because they weren't faithful enough or smart enough or observant enough. It's just that it's all so unexpected. No one would expect the chosen one of God, God's own child, God's own self who will give new life to the world...to be there, looking like just anyone in the crowd. No one would be expecting that, any more than a group of shepherds in a field would have expected to see God wrapped in blankets and sleeping in a stable 'round the back.

There's a strange sort of familiarity in this story. All of us are there in that crowd by the river that day. Or this day. We gather on the shore and we have these fears or hopes or worries or expectations of ours. My own fears deep inside, your worries that keep you awake and staring at the ceiling for hours each night, the weariness of a world or a city where there's always this poverty and racism and pandemics and ways we have been hurt or ways that we still cause the hurt...you name it.... We carry all this around, and we wonder how it will change and we look for ways to fix and we wonder if there's someone or something who will make it all OK.

We're in the crowd by the river....

And among us there's this one we don't even see. As though he doesn't want to stand out. As though he doesn't want to be a hero. As though his place, Jesus' place, is right here, among us, with all the people. Not ruling with power from on high and not with a sword or a ballot box or a bank account or a program. Whatever Jesus does, he does among the people, normal people where we are, with no more safety or security or power, really, than anyone.

And even if we don't notice, he's there. He's here.

And what do we do is take John at his word – that Jesus is coming along – and we get on with our day, seeking generosity, compassion, kindness, honesty, those things that make for the healing of the world. And we get on with our day trusting that Jesus is here somewhere among us, and the Spirit will move us like it moved him. Jesus is here.

Even if we don't notice or we're not sure what it all means or what it looks like, Jesus is here, even if we don't know. And that's OK, because we don't always have to know, you know.

I wonder if even Jesus knew what to expect. Did he wake up that morning thinking "I'm going to the river to be baptized by John, and the Spirit will come down to me", or did he just go with the crowd to hear his distant relative preach, and to be baptized just like the rest of the crowd? To ponder the teaching he heard that day? To pray for awhile? And when the heavens opened, when he looked and saw a dove, did he say something like, "Ah, just as I knew it would be," or did he look and hear and say, "I wasn't expecting this!"? Was even Jesus surprised by the Spirit, and a bit moved and maybe a bit unclear or maybe a bit reassured when the voice said "You are my son, my beloved, I'm pleased with you?"

The Holy Spirit comes down to Jesus in the flesh, as a dove, and a voice speaks that names Jesus as God's son. Now the way that the story unfolds, this is the first time Jesus hears who he is. But that doesn't mean that nobody else knew. The same Spirit who comes to Jesus at his baptism is the Spirit who is said to have worked with Mary to bear this child who is the Son of God, and Mary has always known what's up. That same Spirit filled Mary's cousin Elizabeth – John the Baptizer's mom. Elizabeth knew what's up; she knew that this Jesus is her Lord. That same Spirit filled

Elizabeth's husband, John's dad, and opened his eyes to see that this baby is the one who will somehow fulfil all those hopes of all the people, and the same Spirit filled an old man named Simeon and he said the same thing when Jesus was just eight days old. And now thirty years later Jesus comes to the riverside with all those people, and maybe he's afraid too, or maybe he's unsure about the future, and maybe he wonders who will do something about those pesky Romans, and maybe he's even not clear what his place in the world is.... Then that same Spirit who had spoken *about* him all those years now speaks *to* him and says, "You're my son, my child, my beloved; I'm pleased with you."

Maybe that's what matters most about this baptism of Jesus that we celebrate today. When Jesus is baptized, he hears a word that has already been spoken about him again and again over all those years. And that word sets him on his way and sustains him, and that Spirit will be with him and guide him and sustain him as he finds his way in a world being made new.

And we hear that same word ourselves today. It's a word already spoken over us in our own baptism, whether we were babies or well-seasoned adults. "You are my beloved child, look at you! I'm pleased with you." It's a word that has already been spoken about you and me and us again and again over all those years. It's the word spoken when the Spirit moved over the waters of baptism and over the waters at creation and God said, "That's good!" And that word – You're my child, my beloved - sets us on our way and sustains us, and that Spirit that comes to Jesus, and comes to us, will be with us to guide and sustain us as we find our way in a world being made new.

AMEN.