

Epiphany 1, Yr C, 01-10-10
All Saints Episcopal Church

"You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life."

This week we moved quietly from the Christmas season to the season of Epiphany - the season of new birth and new life to the season of light and the transformation of darkness, the revelation of Christ by the Spirit. It seems like a lot of time has passed since Christmas, both figuratively and literally - in only two weeks we have moved from a babe in a manger to a precocious adolescent in the Temple to a 30-year-old man who is about to launch his 'public ministry.' That's a lot of ground to cover.

And we're only 3 weeks past the winter solstice - the darkest time of the year. It seems like that is not enough time to notice a change in the amount of light we experience in the day, but I have noticed it. Just yesterday, I fell asleep on the sofa in the early afternoon. I dreamed it was nighttime and that I had to wake up in order to finish my sermon. When I awoke, I was surprised and glad that, although the time on my watch made me expect darkness outside, it was still light. Maybe it's because the light of the world has come.

So here we are with the lesson from Luke's gospel concerning Jesus' baptism. If it is sounding particularly familiar to you, it might be because the first part of the lesson for today was the last part of the gospel for the third Sunday of Advent - just a month ago. John the Baptist was doing his thing, and when asked by the people if he might be the Messiah, he announced that there was someone else coming after him who was the one. And Luke tells us that after all the people were

baptized and after Jesus was baptized, a dove appeared over him and a voice from heaven said, "You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well-pleased."

Those are some great words to hear. How wonderful to hear confirmation from your parent - who just happens to be God - made in front of a whole lot of other people, that you are beloved...that you are chosen...that you are the pride of someone's life! That is what happens to Jesus at his baptism, there in front of God and everybody - he is told that he has been chosen, he is loved, he belongs to the One who made him.

The same is true for us. Whether we have been baptized as infants, as seven-year-olds, or as seventy-something-year-olds, we also are told that we are God's beloved. Maybe not with a dove overhead and voice from the clouds, but we are God's chosen. We are God's pride and joy. But wait, didn't I just say that Jesus was God's pride and joy? How can it be that all of us are the same? Don't parents have 'favorites?' I know they say they don't, but don't we all know whether we were the favorite of one parent or the other - or not?

Well, the Good News of this situation is that we ARE, in fact, ALL children of God equally - all beloved equally - all chosen equally - and all of us God's pride and joy equally.

But that's not all. We can't sit back and bask in the knowledge that we are special, and that's it. When we are signed with that indelible mark on our foreheads at our baptisms, we can't erase the promise we have made any more than we can erase the mark. Our promise is a part, not of a contract, but of a covenant.

A contract, by law, is entered into with clear and equal understanding and agreement as to the terms or conditions, results, or consequences. If it is broken by either party, or is abolished, it no longer pertains. A covenant is, by grace, initiated by one party and, even if broken, it endures. A broken contract ends, but a broken covenant lives on. Our Baptismal Covenant is a relationship initiated by God, to which we respond in faith. Once this covenant is made, it is eternal, broken or not, and it can always be healed and restored by forgiveness, reconciliation, and return.

Our covenant is to take on as our own the mission of Jesus; we promise to invest our lives - body, mind and spirit - and any resources and gifts we have to offer - in the mission of ordering the world, as well as ourselves, in harmony with the reign of God - that is, making the world what it should be when God's reign is fulfilled. What that world looks like for Luke is the vision of Isaiah brought to present reality: present tense vindication of the poor, present tense release to prisoners, present tense sight to the blind, present tense freedom for the oppressed. And we don't have to wait for some miraculous signal to tell us it is time. Every Sunday we get the reminder that we have already been commissioned as apostles - "sent ones" - sent forth in Christ's name:

"Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

And how do we serve? Listen to the verbs of our Covenant - they tell us not only how to be, but what to do:

Continue in the apostles' work - by breaking bread and prayers.

Persevere in resisting evil, and when we fail, *return* to the Lord.

Proclaim the Good News by word and example.

Seek and serve Christ in all others by *loving* your neighbor as yourself.

Strive for justice and peace by *respecting* the dignity of everyone.

Will we do those things? Will we be partners in the Covenant with God? This season of light gives us the opportunity to examine our lives and to use that light to see into the dark corners we don't want to see. This season of revelation and transformation gives us the chance to change those dark corners - to transform them into places of light. And then, together, we can use those places of light and transformation to offer help to others in our broken world.

Let us go forth into the light of Christ. AMEN.