

Blessed to Be a Blessing

The Baptism of Our Lord

Text: Matthew 3:13–17

January 13, 2008

A Baseline for Faith

Every year when I go to my doctor for my annual physical exam,
he looks at certain data to monitor my health—
blood pressure, cholesterol, triglycerides, potassium, liver function, etc.

He monitors these numbers against a *baseline*,
a reading of the data from a number of years ago,
and as long as the numbers stay close to the baseline, I am OK,
but if the numbers begin to change and get too far away from the baseline—
he will prescribe medications or other activities
to get things back in line.

Today as we hear the story of the baptism of Jesus,
we hear God give Jesus a *baseline*
as he begins his public ministry.

After Jesus is baptized, something dramatic happens.
The Spirit of God
descends upon him like a dove,
and a voice speaks to him saying,
This is my Son, the Beloved,
with whom I am well pleased.

This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.

That experience becomes a baseline for Jesus as he begins his ministry.
It also becomes a baseline
for the gospels...and for the church.
We will hear these words again in a few weeks at the Transfiguration
as Jesus begins the journey to the cross,
but here, they occur at the beginning of his ministry.

I imagine these words had a deep impact on Jesus
as he begins the work of redemption
God has set before him.

When you were young and going to visit a friend
and stay at their home overnight,
if your experience was anything like mine,
your parents—probably your mother—
worried that you might do something foolish or silly
that would embarrass you or your family.

My mother would almost always send me off with the admonition,
Remember who you are.
In other words, remember your family
and the values that are important to us.

Her admonition always had an influence on my actions.
 They set boundaries for my behavior.
 They influenced everything I said and did
 because I was expected to live up to them.

In the same way, these words, no doubt, have a
 deep impact on Jesus as he his ministry.
This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.

In his humanity,
 Jesus will face a grueling experience
 as he walks throughout Galilee
 proclaiming the advent of the Kingdom of God,
 teaching the disciples, healing the sick, raising the dead,
 and facing the cross.

There are many indications in the gospels
 that Jesus seldom had time for himself,
 and what little time he had
 was spent in prayer to the Father.

With all that was going on around him
 facing such strenuous and stressful demands
 it could be easy for Jesus to get distracted and veer away from his calling:

- the constant needs of the people,
- the constant conflict with the religious leaders and political authorities,
- the constant misunderstandings of him and his work by his own disciples,
- the constant grind of the never-ending backlog of things to do.

In the face of all these distractions,
 Jesus can look back on this experience,
 and be reminded and assured of
 who he is and what he is called to do.

That experience will always be there to help him
 stay the course and do the work of the kingdom
 throughout all the days
 of his ministry.

But these words are not just for Jesus.
 They are a baseline for us as well.
 They proclaim to us who Jesus is.

Jesus is
 the Beloved Son of God
 with whom God is well pleased.
 We know that because God himself
 makes that proclamation
 as Jesus emerges from the waters of the Jordan.

Because he is pleasing to God,
Jesus is able to share with us
the pleasure of God's love
and the gift of life in God's kingdom.

If we ever wonder who Jesus is,
all we have to do
is look back to this moment
and listen to the voice of the Father.
As we listen we will hear God say,
This is my Son, the Beloved,
with whom I am well pleased.

Because Jesus is the *Beloved* Son,
he is able to do the work of redemption
that God has given him to do.

He is indeed able to
forgive our sins...
he is indeed able to
give us life in the Kingdom of God forever.