

The Baptism of our Lord + January 8, 2011

This sermon is the Sermon and the Children's message combined into one. Invite the children to come forward and gather around the chancel steps and a large, clear bowl on top of a small table. The preacher will sit behind the table and will address children and adults in the larger assembly.

Welcome! Now, watch as I pour water into the bowl. Listen as the water is poured. I wonder what this water is ... *(invite responses)* Water makes us clean. Water is what we drink when we are thirsty. Water drowns and refreshes us. Water even saves us! I want to invite you to listen carefully ... I want to invite all of us to listen carefully as we hear about all the ways God has used water and uses water still...

Hold hands over the water and use gestures.

In the beginning there was nothing but darkness. All was chaos. And suddenly, the Spirit of God swept over the waters and God created light. And God saw the light and God said *(light candle here)* that the light was good! So, God separated the light from the dark. The light God called daytime. The dark God called nighttime. And then God made a big dome above the waters and there was sky above the waters. So, from the waters God made the sky and below the sky the land and the sea. And God filled the sky with all kinds of create ruse that fly like bids and insects and anything else with flapping wings and God filled the earth or the land with cats and dogs and cows and sheep and people like you and me. And God filled with sea with fish and whales and all kinds of creatures that swim in the water. From the water God made light and dark and land and sea and sky and God said it was GOOD.

Once there was a dangerous flood that filled the land. The water overflowed the earth. But there was an ark, a kind of boat that travelled through the flood and everyone on the boat was safe. Now, on the ark were Noah and his family and birds and land animals of all kinds. And after a very long and rocky ride in this flood, Noah and everyone else on the ark were safe. So, after the flood God set a rainbow in the sky, a lot like the kinds of colorful rainbows we see in the sky after a big rain. The rainbow was a sign of God's love and promise so that no one would forget that God would care for us and keep us safe and love us.

Now, there was a time when God's people were in slavery. They became salves under a ruler called Pharaoh. As slaves they were not free. This made their lives very hard and sad. God saw how sad they were and how hard their lives were and God led them to freedom. God told Moses to stretch his hands over the waters and the waters rose to create a path through the water. It was a path of dry ground and the people of God crossed the ground safely and then the waters covered and destroyed all that was evil. God's people were set free and they began their long journey to a new home called the Promised Land because it was a new home for them promised by God.

When God's people finally entered the land God promised them they crossed over water. This special place of water is called the Jordan River. The people of God went through the water to arrive at their new home.

Once there was a man named John who came to this Jordan River. His name was John. He welcomed people to come to the River. All kinds of people came to the River. John invited

them to come to the water and to change their lives. So many came to enter the water and to get ready for the coming of Jesus.

Jesus himself came to the water to be baptized by John. He would really change people's lives. So, one day Jesus came to the River Jordan and John baptized him and suddenly, when Jesus came up out of the waters, something amazing and astonishing happened. The sky split open. God's own Spirit came down upon Jesus and rested on him and a voice came from heaven: "You are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

God said this: You are my Son, my chosen, marked by my love, the pride of my life. Once again, God saw the light. This time the light was Jesus and God called the light good.

One day you came to the waters and were baptized or one day you will come to the waters to be baptized and on that day the same Spirit of God that swept over the waters and came down on Jesus came down on you or will come down on you and the voice from heaven that spoke to Jesus speaks to you "You are my daughter ... you are my son, my chosen, marked by my love, pride of my life."

On the day of your baptism you were or will be washed (sprinkle the kids) and you did or will receive the Cross of Jesus on your brow with these words: "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the Cross of Christ forever." Forever! God says to you, to us: You are marked by my love.

Today we remember and give thanks to God for the gift of Baptism and we will feel the touch of water on our bodies to remember, again, who we are: beloved children of God, marked by God's love, the pride of God's life.

God uses the water to create, to save, to rescue, and to free us, to give us a home, to claim and adopt us into the family of God ... to mark us with God's own love.

Each time we come into this worship space we may stop at the font before worship or when we leave worship and dip our hands into the water and make the sign of the Cross, the sign of God's make of love upon us. We may make the sign of the Cross each day as we begin our day and end our day. I wonder what difference it makes to know that we are marked by God's love.

In a few moments we will renew our baptismal vows ... the promises we make to live as the people of God, and to commit our lives to following Jesus. I wonder what it looks like for all of us to live as those called by God, set apart by God, chosen by God, marked with the sign of the Cross ... marked by God's love.

Today the sky has split open. Today light has come into our darkness. Today the Spirit of God rests upon us. Today we come to the waters. Today we hear the voice of God who is right here in our midst saying: "You are my daughters, my sons, my chosen ones, marked by my love, pride of my life." The Kingdom of Heaven is here among us.

Now, as those marked by God's love, let us give thanks and recommit our lives to Christ.

The service continues with the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Promises.