

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## Sermon Reflection Notes

The Gospel of Matthew is a book about Jesus written to a Jewish audience. From the beginning of the book, Matthew draws parallels between the story of Jesus and the story of Israel. He begins with the genealogy to let us know that Jesus is rooted in the old story of Abraham, Isaac, Ruth, Solomon, and Uriah. Jesus is a direct descendant of King David. He goes in and out of Egypt, fleeing a murderous tyrant; Jesus is baptized in the River Jordan, the same one Joshua led the people through before they entered the Promised Land. This is the story of God, and while Jesus may be a new character in the story, it's like he was in it all along.

The Baptism of the Lord Sunday is the day we remember that Jesus was baptized, which is remarkable when you consider the context. His cousin John was baptizing those who sought to have their sins forgiven, and Jesus—the one who is without sin—just got in line. It's like Jesus was saying: "Here I am. I'm with them—the community of faith." John the Baptist protested when he saw Jesus waiting to be baptized. John's whole mission was to announce the coming of Christ and then there Jesus was, standing before him as a candidate for baptism. It's a total reversal of the way the world works. It's also totally Jesus. Jesus, who went around feeding the hungry; Jesus who knelt to wash the feet of those around him...those who should have been washing his.

God in the flesh, Emmanuel, says: *"If you are going to get in the water, I am too. I will always be with you. I want you to feed the hungry, but I'll do it too. I want you to welcome the stranger, but I will too. I want you to eat with sinners, proclaim release to the captives, set at liberty those who are oppressed---and I will do it all with you."*

Jesus' baptism was a glorious coronation, a thunderclap from the heavens declaring him as God's beloved son with whom God is well-pleased. And then Jesus climbed out of the water and went to be tested by the devil in the desert for forty days. He went to the desert, and then to the difficult world among the people, with the people.

When we are baptized, we too climb up out of the water and are thrown into the challenging world of discipleship. How do we find our way to the roles we are to play in God's story? How do we love God and love neighbor? How do we join Jesus in being with others in this complicated world? How can we heal the sick? Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with God? Participate in the work of redemption and recreation?

It can feel too overwhelming, paralyzing even. But vows were made: to repent of our sin, to resist evil, injustice, and oppression, to put our whole trust in Jesus Christ. Where do we even begin?

Sharon McMahon said: "Nobody can do everything, but everyone can do something, and we cannot allow our inability to solve all the world's problems to paralyze us into doing nothing."

Peter Maurin said: "Decide the work you're going to do, prepare yourself to do it, and then go do it." We don't have to fix the world; it's not even our responsibility to do it all. But we are called to remember our baptism, to realize there is work to do, all sorts of work, and decide what we want to do, prepare, and then go do it. Start like Jesus did—when people were hungry, he gave them some food. He worshipped God and spent time in prayer. He offered compassion to those who others ignored. Remember who you are and whose you are. And then go do something beautiful.

## And You Come to Me?

## Scripture

Matthew 3:13-17 (NRSVUE)

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. <sup>16</sup> And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw God’s Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from the heavens said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

## Discussion Questions

1. At our baptisms, we (or someone who promised on our behalf) pledged to “renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of our sin.” We don’t spend a lot of time talking about evil, wickedness, and sin necessarily. What are examples of ‘spiritual forces of wickedness’ or ‘evil powers of this world’? [The goal is NOT to name political parties/players or specific events...we can probably think of those ourselves. Think big picture. Things every single person regardless of political party or beliefs face while living in the world.]
2. How do we “accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression?” What freedom and power do we have that God has given us? What are ways we can ‘resist’? [Again, not a political question...think about hearts and minds.]
3. We confess Jesus as our Savior and promise to “put our whole trust in his grace, and to serve him as our Lord.” What does it look like and feel like to put our whole trust in his grace? What do we want to sometimes put our trust in instead?
4. We were reminded this week to ‘remember who we are.’ This is both a call and an echo; at his own baptism, God called and claimed Jesus, and Jesus had to accept that identity and all that came with it. Modern culture gives us other examples of this story: “In *The Lion King*, Rafiki asks Simba ‘Who are you?’ It is a pivotal moment: Rafiki confronts Simba’s denial of his true identity as the rightful heir to the Pride Lands. It is only later that Simba finally gets it, when his late father Mufasa speaks to him from the sky: ‘Remember who you are. ...You are my son and the one true king.’ Only then is Simba able to come to terms with his past, lay claim to his identity, and take up his responsibility to restore the Pride Lands.” (*The Christian Century* Jan. 2026)
5. Our baptism is an act of God. God claims us and calls us. What does it mean then to ‘remember who we are,’ to accept the identity God gives us?
6. What are examples of specific, concrete things we can do before the end of January to remember who we are and live into our baptismal vows? [Think outside the box...and of things you are not already doing. Remember the quote: Decide what to do. Prepare to do it, and then go do it.]

## Closing Prayer

We remember the story that is our story. The splashing of the Jordan River waters. Jesus being plunged beneath the water. The heavens opening and the voice that proclaimed: "You are my beloved Son."

We remember the story that is our story. At the baptismal font, in a river, water splashed over our head, family, and church family gathered to hear the word: "You are claimed and named to be God's beloved son or daughter. You belong to God's family."

And we remember that in our own baptismal waters, like Jesus, we are grafted into the family of God, we are summoned to live faithfully with God, and we are rooted into God's promise for a new life. We are called to God's newness and hope. We are called to love and forgiveness. We are called to follow Jesus. It is in his name that we remember, and we pray. Amen.

*"Remember your baptism. Remember whose you are."*