

1 Epiphany 2004C  
"Baptized a Son"  
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Today is the first Sunday of Epiphany, the celebration of the Baptism of our Lord. Jesus' baptism was a watershed event (was that a pun?) in his life. It marked the beginning of his ministry as Messiah.

As Luke tells the story, we see Jesus in the shallow water of the Jordan River, soaking wet. John has just poured water over his head or (if you are of Baptist inclination) dunked him in the river. Suddenly heaven opens and the Holy Spirit descends upon him and God speaks and declares "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

**Jesus has a difficult road ahead of him.** Immediately after this he's going to fast in the desert for 40 days, and after that he'll embark on a backbreaking ministry that will fill his life 24/7 for the next three years, ending in persecution, torture and death. That's quite a career path.

At his baptism Jesus receives that calling and gets the power to fulfill it. How does the power come? Not as an abstraction, a jolt, an infusion, a blast of radiation. He doesn't become a superhero or some kind of mutant like the X-Men.

Jesus is empowered by God's word and Holy Spirit. They communicate Jesus' identity, revealing who he is audibly to his understanding and spiritually to his innermost being. God says, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

**That's a short little phrase, but it is PACKED with significance.** This single statement actually quotes two different Scriptures. "You are my Son" quotes Psalm 2, which is very similar to Psalm 89 which we have this morning. Both Psalms speak of the coming Messianic King who will defeat the wicked, establish justice and set the world straight. Jesus' baptism anoints him for that kingly role.

But there's more. The second part of that phrase, "In you I am well pleased", quotes Isaiah 42, which is our Old Testament lesson. "Here is my servant...in whom my soul delights." It's the first of several Servant songs in Isaiah, which portray a Suffering Servant who will suffer and die to save the people.

What's amazing about this short baptismal phrase is it combines in ONE man the attributes and calling of BOTH the mighty King AND the Suffering Servant. No one anticipated that they could be combined in the same person. And yet, here he is. He's the One who **will triumph over evil...through suffering and death.**

How does this relate to us? It's simple. Jesus wants to share this intimate Father-Son relationship with each one of us. He came to restore us to that relationship with God. And it begins in baptism. Just as Jesus' identity as God's Son was declared in baptism, our identity is too.

**And identity is extremely important.** All of us search for our place in the world. Growing up, we grope for a sense of self: Who am I? What should I do with my life? Those of you with kids in college are hoping the answers come soon!

We eventually find our identity in our education, career, family, affiliation, and in the incidentals of life: the coat we wear, the car we drive, the neighborhood we live in, how we look and what we like. These are things that help us "locate" ourselves in the great big world around us. They shape and proclaim our identity.

**And that's precisely our problem.** When we fashion our identity out of what we are or have or do, our identity is always fragile, unstable, shifting, threatened by things. Lose your health, your house, your spouse, your job, your possessions and you lose your identity with them.

Build your identity on anything other than God and you'll be inherently vulnerable and insecure and fearful. And that's how most people live their lives, trying to control and protect themselves at all costs. And it's so costly!

**But Jesus puts our identity on a completely different foundation.** Paul talks about it in Romans 8:15. "You have not received a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of Sonship, by which we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' And his Spirit testifies within us that we are the children of God."

**We're getting the same thing Jesus got.** It's as if Jesus is saying, "Because I have this incredibly intimate, unique relationship with God, you can have the same relationship with God THROUGH ME. Join me as a child of God."

We receive the same Spirit of Sonship as Jesus, who bears the same testimony to the core of our being that WE are children, beloved of our Father. Just imagine God saying that to YOU! Just imagine having the assurance of hearing that deep in your soul, ringing in your inner most being. **Have you heard it yet?**

Have you heard that parental resonance, that voice of God's assurance inside of you: "You are my child, with whom I am well pleased. I am utterly satisfied." Paul says that the Spirit bears witness within us that we ARE a child of God. Jesus includes us in his intimacy with the Father.

How can I believe that God is well pleased with me? Why is God pleased with us? Because he is pleased with Jesus. He is pleased with the sacrifice of his Servant for you, which is sufficient to overcome your deficiency.

When you "get" that you get three things: honor, access and absolute safety.

**Honor - "You are my Son..."** The son was the heir, who got everything the father had: possessions, status, rank. Jesus is saying you can share this honor with him as sons and daughters of God. God's valuing of you is infinite.

If that's true, who cares what people think? If you really had a sense of the honor of being a son ringing in your soul, you wouldn't be cast down by people's criticism, or controlled by their expectations, or anxious for their approval. Jesus can give you that kind of relationship with God.

**Access - "...my Beloved"**. Jesus instructed his disciples, "When you pray say, "OUR Father who art in heaven...". This was a truly radical and utterly unheard of teaching. Before Jesus, no had ever said anything like this, addressing God in such a personal way. In Christ we address God not just as Father, but as Abba, which is a child's name for God, like "Pappa". That shows the access we have.

Think of it this way. Who in the world can ask you for a glass of water at 2 am? A friend? Go away. Your spouse? Maybe. How about your little child? Definitely. Jesus can give you a relationship with the Father. There's nothing like it in any other religion.

**Absolute Safety - "...with whom I am well pleased."** A parent's love is the most unshakable love, more than romantic and friend love. The more the child acts up the MORE engaged and hurt and importunate you become. A parent can't just let go...and either can God.

When you are in Christ, a child of God, you are UTTERLY safe in his love. If you are experiencing a relationship like that think of the freedom it gives you! You can be bold, because who cares what other people think. You can be humble and freely admit what's wrong because your identity isn't wrapped up protecting yourself. Jesus has that majesty and meekness as Great King and Suffering Servant and he can give it to you, too.

**So how do you get it?** You get it by coming to Jesus, by being baptized into him, by understanding what he offers you and by humbly receiving it. God will give you that resonance in your heart as he did to Jesus, that we are children of God. It will change your life from the inside and transform your identity and character and make you more and more like Jesus.

Let's pray.

Almighty God, you gave your only Son Jesus Christ so we might experience your Fatherly love for us in him. Grant that we might know that love resonating in our inmost heart and have our lives and identities based on that alone, through Jesus

Christ our Lord, who lives in perfect love with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, AMEN.