

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
COMPASS, PA

January 11, 2026 – BAPTISM OF THE LORD, YR. A

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*Baptized for New Life in Christ*”

Old Testament	Isaiah 42:1-9	(God will put His spirit upon His Servant, and bring about new things)
Psalter	Psalms 29	(Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength; worship Him in holiness)
Epistle	Acts 10:34-43	(Christ shows no partiality and forgives all who believe in Him)
Gospel	St. Matthew 3:13-17	(Jesus is baptized in the Jordan by John, and affirmed by God)

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In the biblical story of Creation, the first verse of the Torah begins with God breathing over the waters: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep while a wind from God [or ‘the spirit of God’] swept over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:1). The biblical story of Creation portrays life springing from the breath of God moving over the waters. Scientific evidence also confirms the oceans as the place where life first appeared on earth nearly three-and-half-billion years ago.<sup>1</sup>

The story of Jesus also begins with water. Our celebration of Christ’s baptism on the First Sunday after Epiphany is patterned after the practice of the Eastern Orthodox Church and reminds us that according to all four Gospel accounts, it is His baptism which inaugurated His ministry.<sup>2</sup>

Today we read of Jesus coming to John to be baptized. However, John, believing Jesus to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn. 1:29)—and one who outranks him both spiritually and existentially (Jn. 1:30)—hesitates to baptize the One who is Himself without sin. After all, Jesus does not need to repent of *anything*. So why is He coming for baptism? Jesus tells John it is so that all righteousness may be fulfilled. In the historical Jewish context “righteousness” did not refer to individual morality. “To fulfill all righteousness” meant fulfilling the demands of God upon His people, and also the fulfillment of those Scriptures in which God’s demands are laid out—the law, the prophets, and the writings. Therefore, the baptism administered by John was a direct response to the will of God, to which the Messiah must submit in all things.<sup>3</sup>

So, here is Jesus, God having taken on human flesh, submitting Himself to John for baptism—a *baptism of repentance*—a foretaste of an even greater absurdity still to come, that the Son of God will suffer and die a sinner’s death on the Cross in order to accomplish the salvation of humankind. The Bible tells us that both these improbable events were actually the will of God, a will that is revealed in Jesus Christ, is declared in the Gospels, and is grasped not by logic but through faith.<sup>4</sup>

The first words of our opening hymn, “Christ, when for us you were baptized,” point to precisely why *both* Jesus’ baptism and crucifixion were *for us*. In both, Jesus took upon Himself *our* sins, that in baptism, we would be washed clean of them, and through His sacrificial death, we would receive eternal forgiveness for those sins, and inherit eternal life with God in heaven.

The second important part of today’s Gospel lesson is the moment when, just as Jesus comes up out of the water, God’s voice is heard, and the Spirit of God comes upon Jesus to confirm and proclaim His identity as God’s beloved Son. This is clearly a Trinitarian event, wherein we see all three persons of the undivided Trinity—One God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—at work.

Peter Chrysologus, a great 5<sup>th</sup>-century preacher, wrote of this event: “Today, as the psalmist prophesied, ‘The voice of the Lord is heard above the waters.’ What does the voice say? ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ Today the Holy Spirit hovers over the waters in the likeness of a dove. A dove announced to Noah that the flood had disappeared from the earth; so now a new dove is to reveal that the world’s shipwreck is at end for ever.”<sup>5</sup> Out of the waters of the flood, God was making a new Creation. And out of the waters of baptism, *we* emerge as new creations in Christ.

The story of Jesus' baptism reminds us that we, like Jesus and John the Baptist, have been called to "fulfill all righteousness"—that is, to accept God's will for us as they did, to become followers of Christ, and to align our lives with what He teaches us. We find the core of that teaching in the Gospel of Matthew two chapters later, when Jesus delivers the Sermon on the Mount.

In that powerful message we learn how to be disciples of Christ by following the way of the beatitudes, becoming peacemakers in the face of rallying cries for war, bringing the message of love and mercy to a society that foments hatred at an astonishing rate, and acting as reconcilers in our own families and communities, forgiving others as we wish to be forgiven. Like Jesus at His baptism, God's Holy Spirit comes upon us when we are baptized, to empower us for mission and ministry. And He continues to abide within us, giving us direction, discernment, and guidance for daily witness and action.

Baptism, of course, is just the starting point. The baptism that Jesus received in the Jordan was his first baptism. Later, He tells His disciples that He has another 'baptism' to receive—His atoning death for the sins of the world. When James and John begin jockeying for places of honor in His coming kingdom, Jesus asks whether they can be baptized with that second baptism.

While the Sacrament of Christian baptism is about identity, discipleship, and mission, it is also about being joined to Christ in His dying and rising. In Romans 6, Paul tells us that "all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death." We have died with Christ, the apostle tells us, so that "we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3-4). If we want to live *with* and *in* Christ—and to live eternally—we have to die, to sin, self, and the world, and live only for Christ. But we can't do this alone. We need God's help to surrender ourselves in that way. And the Lord will provide that help whenever we ask for it. After all, we are His children and He loves us.

Our new life in Christ begins in the water but continues in the Spirit. Just as the breath of God blew life into being for planet earth, and just as the Spirit came upon Jesus at His baptism, so too has God given us His Holy Spirit as our companion and guide in daily living, in times of trial, and even in the face of death.<sup>6</sup>

Just as Jesus rose up out of the waters of the Jordan River into new life, our baptism pulls us from the waves of death into God's redeeming love, showing us that death isn't the end but a new beginning. And, as Jesus was affirmed by God in His baptism, we, too are God's beloved sons and daughters. That identity is for each of us to claim and to live out with joy and confidence.

The outcome of our baptism should be that we emulate Christ in thought, word, and deed, communicating the merciful love of God to all humankind. If we take our Baptismal Covenant seriously—and I hope and pray that we do—then we are to live out our baptismal promises to resist evil, seek justice, and respect the dignity of EVERY human being. Those promises call us to follow Jesus, confessing our sins, loving our neighbor, and proclaiming the Good News to anyone who will listen.

If you are baptized, you are marked with the sign of the cross. Go forth with that cross leading the way, and be God's light in a world of darkness.<sup>7</sup> *Amen.*

<sup>1</sup> Adapt. Mike McMahon, 8 January 2023, "Beginnings – Baptism of the Lord, Year A," [The Hymn Society](https://thehymnsociety.org/beginnings-baptism-of-the-lord-year-a-epiphany-of-the-lord-rc/) <https://thehymnsociety.org/beginnings-baptism-of-the-lord-year-a-epiphany-of-the-lord-rc/> 2 January 2026.

<sup>2</sup> Adapt. Marion Soards, Thomas Dozeman, Kendall McCabe, eds. "Baptism of the Lord (First Sunday After Epiphany)," [Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A: Advent/Christmas/Epiphany](#) (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1992) p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> Adapt. W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, transl. "Matthew," [The Anchor Bible](#) (New York, Doubleday, 1971), pp. 31-32

<sup>4</sup> Adapt. Marion Soards, Thomas Dozeman, Kendall McCabe, p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Qtd. [Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours](#) (Baltimore, Helicon Press, 1976), p. 1760.

<sup>6</sup> McMahon, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Adapt. Ann M. Sith, "Marked by Baptism," 11 January 2020, [Blogspot.com](https://onlinesermons.blogspot.com/2020/01/the-baptism-of-lord-year-a.html) <https://onlinesermons.blogspot.com/2020/01/the-baptism-of-lord-year-a.html> 2 January 2026.