

## **WORSHIP AT HOME: Weeks of 1.9.22 and 1.16.22**

### **Baptism of Our Lord and 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany**



*As you begin you might light a candle, quiet your heart, and prepare to worship God. You will need a bible for the scripture readings. Read aloud or in silence, as you prefer.*

*BEGIN: (You may trace a cross on your forehead or make the sign of the cross.)*

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✠ one God, who creates us, redeems us, and calls us by name.  
Amen.

*CONFESS: (You may offer your prayer of confession to God with a repentant heart.)*

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you and your beloved children. We have rejected your word when it made us confront ourselves. We have failed to show hospitality to those you called us to welcome. Accept our repentance for the things we have done and the things we have left undone. For the sake of Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us and lead us, that we may bathe in the glory of your Son born among us, and reflect your love for all creation. Amen.

*(Read these words to yourself and know that the grace of God in Christ is for you.)*

We rejoice in this good news: In ✠ Christ Jesus, our sins are forgiven. We are descendants of the Most High, adopted into the household of Christ, and inheritors of eternal life. May we live as freed and forgiven children of God. Amen.

**PRAY:**

- (1.9.22) Almighty God, you anointed Jesus at his baptism with the Holy Spirit and revealed him as your beloved Son. Keep all who are born of water and the Spirit faithful in your service, that we may rejoice to be called children of God, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
- (1.16.22) Lord God, source of every blessing, you showed forth your glory and led many to faith by the works of your Son, who brought gladness and salvation to his people. Transform us by the Spirit of his love, that we may find our life together in him, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

**READ:**

- (1.9.22) Isaiah 43:1-7 and Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
- (1.16.22) Isaiah 62:1-5 and John 2:1-11

**SERMON** for 1.9.22 by *Pastor Beth Ann L. Stone*

January of 2022 is a hard time to live through, for so many people around the globe. I think first of people struggling in hospitals, both the patients and the overworked staff. I think of family members and friends who couldn't or can't be with loved ones because they're

sick or they're isolating or they're trying to be extra careful. I think of teachers and students and parents who are trying to do what's best at a time when it's not altogether clear what that is. I think of business owners and managers and employees and health officials and elected leaders all trying to figure out how to move forward. I think of health-compromised people whose daily lives have shrunk considerably as they try to avoid needing to go to the hospital. I think of healthy people frustrated by the changes being imposed on them, resenting the folks trying to enforce them. And that's to say nothing of the millions of people still living without access to vaccines or treatments for Covid and other diseases that surely make them wonder if their lives even matter to the rest of us. Does that include everybody? It's hard right now, for sure.

When there's a lot of free-floating anxiety in the air, like there is right now, we can feel unanchored, like there's a fog over everything. It can be hard to concentrate on things we have to do. Things that we might be otherwise be looking forward to to break things up aren't available to us due to Covid or even just winter. So instead some of us downshift into not doing much of anything, and the days start to all look pretty much the same.

One thing you may be feeling right now is a lack of spark. You haven't had the usual experiences that bring you a lot of joy, that fill your cup, so to speak. Most of us haven't. Maybe your faith has been strained by everything going on in the world...your faith in other people, if not your faith in God. Maybe your faith in God is feeling a little lackluster with all the languishing around us. So how do we strengthen our faith? How does God work to build up our faith?

Sometimes our faith grows when we're hit with a major loss...the death of a loved one, a scary diagnosis, an accident, a job loss, the end of an important relationship. It's not that God would ever cause such things to happen in order to grow our faith; but when we're hit with something like that and work to trust God in the midst of it, God can bring good out of death and even out of evil. A God who reached down into the grave to raise Jesus to everlasting life can surely raise something hopeful and life-giving out all of our struggles and traumas. Counselors, therapists, support groups, and spiritual directors are some of the resources we can turn to when we're faced with the work of finding hope in the midst of great loss. If you've been hit hard by a loss this year and haven't yet found hope or meaning or a greater connection to God in the aftermath, I encourage you to reach out so we can help you find resources to move forward in that important work.

Besides coming to grips with a loss, sometimes our faith grows when we have an epiphany, a sudden revelation about something. We read something or hear something or see something and some internal disjointed pieces of our faith suddenly click into place in a new way. Wow! We get it, we see it now! Unfortunately we can't bring on an epiphany just because we want one. But we can keep alert, keep those fragments of faith fresh and on the top of our minds so they're ready for the lightning strikes to bring them together. We keep those pieces of our faith fresh and available through the practices that believers have followed for generations...through regular prayer, reading scripture, and coming to worship, discussing our faith with other Christians, and by serving people in need.

In addition to surviving a major loss or experiencing an epiphany, today's scripture readings also hint at another way God moves to strengthen our faith. The church calls them sacraments, namely Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Today we recall the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan River, but it's also a day to remember our own baptism.

When you hear the words "remember your baptism", some might immediately think, "I was too young to remember my baptism!" Many of us were baptized as babies, too young for the experience itself to be lodged in our memory banks. But remembering your baptism isn't about remembering that event so much as remembering what it meant and what it continues to mean.

The sacraments are all about remembering, in fact. It's so easy to take our faith for granted, to walk around in this foggy haze of things always being the way they are. And short of a catastrophe or an epiphany, we need experiences that can goose us out of our complacency and remind us of who God is to us, and who we are to God. That's what the sacraments are...experiential memory joggers to help us grow our faith.

That's easier to see, maybe, in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The prayer of thanksgiving, or the Eucharistic prayer, is always one of remembering God's mighty acts, and most especially the act of sending us Jesus. And in Jesus' own words we hear him say, "Take and eat, take and drink. Do this to remember me." Remember, remember...may this bread and wine jog your memory that Jesus is with you, right now, in this meal and in the community around the table. Remember Jesus gave himself for you. Remember Jesus calls you disciple, friend, and sibling, and wants you to see each other as the same. Remember, remember, remember. Each time we receive the sacrament is another experience of remembering who Jesus is to us, and we to him.

Now the other sacrament is also about remembering, but comes at it a little differently. We don't repeat the experience of baptism on a regular basis, like we do with communion; instead we REMEMBER our baptism, we remember that we are baptized. We remember that, once upon a time, each of us was brought to the baptismal font. Your first and middle names were spoken...Beth Ann...Charles Wesley...(insert your name here)...and your forehead was splashed with water three times...I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. When you were baptized, you were named and claimed, individually and specifically, as God's own child. You were personally marked with the cross of Christ on your forehead, so that the whole universe could recognize you as one who bears Christ with you. Though no one heard the God speak at your baptism the way at Jesus', in that experience God declared, "you are my beloved child; with you I am well pleased."

You are beloved because of who you are...not because of what you do, or what you believe, or how strong is your faith. You are known and precious and claimed by name by the God of the whole universe, honored and loved. REMEMBER that you are BAPTIZED! When the weight of the world feels crushing, REMEMBER you are BAPTIZED! When you're searching for hope in the midst of despair, or you're celebrating an epiphany that God drops into your lap, REMEMBER you are baptized! Child of God...you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit...and marked with the cross of Christ forever. Amen.

REFLECT (1.16.22) See the attached Bible Study handout for John 2:1-11 or call to hear a recording of this week's sermon: 857-385-7422 (long-distance rates may apply).

PRAY: By the Holy Spirit, you gather your church and send it out in mission to share the good news of Jesus. Inspire your faithful people to be fervent in prayer and service, that all people know they are precious in your sight.

You reveal your love and power through water and the Spirit. Guard rivers, seas, and all bodies of water from destruction and pollution. Secure access to clean water for all, and protect the land from drought and flood.

Establish among the nations the blessings of peace. Raise up leaders who will protect vulnerable people in their care. Strengthen advocates who risk reputation or retaliation for the sake of mercy and justice.

You protect us through the fires and troubled waters of this life. Assure us that we will not be cut off from you by illness or despair, anxiety or pain, confusion or weakness. Comfort all who are in any need, especially health care workers everywhere, Dick Jonas, Linda Schweissinger, Sheila Johnson, Karen Tyykila, Cathy Spatz, Kenn Spatz, Diane Poulsen, Pastor Kara Baylor, Joanne Hoornstra, Andy Cawley, Kim Davis, Nancy Holtz, Kay Olson, Ray Lester, Lori Cottingham, Gabbie Smith, Joyce Friend, all who suffer from Covid-19, and these we name...

We pray for all who mourn the loss of loved ones, especially Duane Smith on the death of his wife, Carla Smith. Surround the grieving with the hope of Christ's resurrection.

We are joined in baptism to Christ and to one another. Bless the newly baptized and people preparing for baptism. Help us to be faithful in fellowship, worship, evangelism, service, and justice-seeking. God of grace, hear our prayer.

Since we have such great hope in your promises, O God, we lift these and all of our prayers to you in confidence and faith; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

BLESS: God, who leads us in pathways of righteousness, who rejoices over us, and who calls us by name, ✠ bless our going out and our coming in, today and forever. Amen.

