

**Rev. Kevin V. Madigan**  
**Church of St. Thomas More, NYC**  
**Baptism of the Lord Year C     January 13, 2019     Luke 3:15-16; 21-22**

We come here this evening as people of faith to celebrate the Baptism of Jesus, and in sense to celebrate our own baptism. Faith is given to us an antidote to prevent us from succumbing to the corrupting influences of the world in which we live. That antidote consists in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This is what Baptism is all about. Baptism unites us to the risen Christ, so that the love of God made visible in Him can invade our lives to support and strengthen us, as we grow to full stature in our humanity. Of course, there is nothing magical, nothing automatic, about Baptism. But the sacrament is the assurance of God's continuing and supportive presence in our lives.

We often refer to Baptism as a "christening," i.e. because our whole lives are to be seen as a sort of "christening," "a becoming more and more like Jesus Christ." But that word "christening" is a little ambiguous--we use the same word to "christen" a ship. After the ship is finally constructed, we have a big celebration, we give the ship a name, we break a bottle of champagne on the side of the ship, and then the ship is launched into life, never to return again till, at the end of its career, it is put in dry dock. That is not the sense of "christening" that pertains to Baptism. Rather it is the first step in a lifetime's journey of faith, whereby we endeavor to become the complete human being God calls us to be.

We are born into a world that is so often at odds with itself, a world of selfishness, cruelty, injustice, stupidity. This is what theologians call "original sin;" otherwise known as the "human condition." In the words of St. Paul, "The good I want to do, I can't do, and what I don't want to do, I end up doing." We are born into a world where it is so difficult to grow beyond the confines of our ego, where so often we are subject to the cravings of our instincts, so often paralyzed by our fears. In Baptism, we are rescued from that world: we are born into a relationship with the risen Christ, so that we can begin to move beyond those limitations, to embrace life in all its wonder and possibility.

At Baptism we are welcomed into the Church which is to be seen, not just as a building or institution, but as a community of people who continually struggle against the temper of the times, trying to incorporate into our lives the virtues, the values, the strength and compassion shown to us in the life of Jesus. If our life is, indeed, to be described as a "christening," then we will have to learn to imitate Jesus. Someone has said, "The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints." Within the Church

we have available to us the healing presence of Christ. The sacraments of the Church continue the work of Jesus. Confirmation strengthens what began in Baptism, giving us a sense of mission to make this world a more just and loving place; the Eucharist is food for life's journey; Penance restores that union with God, when it has been severed by our turning away from God; Matrimony and Holy Orders equip us to live out our life's calling, our vocation; and the Sacrament of the Sick provides physical healing in a time of serious illness and prepares one for that final journey into God's care.

Baptism then is nothing more, nothing less, than God's welcome and our response to the invitation to live as a child of God, as demonstrated for us in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, God's Beloved Son. Let us pray, then, that we may be renewed and strengthened by Christ's Spirit to live out our baptismal commitment, that we can love as God loves, and show ourselves to be truly the children of God.