

The Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord stands at a threshold. Christmas has ended. And — within only two weeks — the Church calendar turns from the cradle to the calling of Jesus. And at this moment — before a miracle is worked, before a sermon is preached, before a cross is suffered — Jesus steps into the waters of baptism.

Matthew tells us that Jesus comes to John to be baptized by him. And this is very strange, so John resists. Here he is, facing the unspotted lamb who has come to take away the sins of the world. But Jesus insists: “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.”

Even though he is not in need of baptism, Jesus does not stand apart from us. He steps fully into our human story, identifying himself with a people in need of grace. And as he does, heaven opens. The Spirit descends like a dove. The Father’s voice declares, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, the Father names who he is: God’s own beloved Son. And this leads me to the day’s Collect, where we ask God to “keep your children, born of water & the Spirit, faithful to their calling.” Baptism is not merely something Jesus

receives but something we all share in. His baptism illuminates ours.

In our reading from Isaiah, we see this more clearly. The servant of the Lord is introduced with words echoed at the Jordan: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him.” This servant brings justice not by shouting or by coercion but by steadfast obedience.

At Jesus’ baptism, this prophecy comes into focus. The servant is the Son. The Holy Spirit rests upon him. And his calling—to bring light, healing, & reconciliation—begins here, in the water. Because in baptism, we are joined to Christ. We are named as God’s children. And we are given a calling — not identical to Christ’s, but an extension of his mission.

That is why the Collect does not simply ask God to create faith, but to keep us faithful to our calling. Baptism initiates us into a life that must be lived, renewed, & sustained by God’s grace. In Psalm 29, the psalmist proclaims the voice of the Lord thundering over the waters. The same voice that speaks creation into being now speaks blessing over God’s people: “The Lord shall give strength to his people; the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.”

In baptism, water is the place where God's power & peace meet. In baptism, God does not merely wash us — he claims us, strengthens us, & speaks peace over us.

As Christians, we come to know that God's peace does not mean a life of ease. As Peter proclaims in the Book of Acts, Jesus' ministry begins "after the baptism that John announced." From there, Jesus goes about doing good, healing, confronting evil, & ultimately bearing the cross. God anoints him with the Holy Spirit & with power—not to avoid suffering, but to be faithful through it.

So what does this mean for us, early in this new year? The Collect is honest about our need. It assumes that our faithfulness will not just come automatically. It must be guarded, nurtured, & sustained by God. And so we pray not simply that we would remember our baptism, but that God will keep us — because distractions, discouragements, & fears are real.

To be faithful to our calling does not mean having everything figured out. It means living from our identity as beloved children. It means returning, again & again, to the truth spoken over us: You are mine. God has claimed us.

Like Jesus, our calling flows from our relationship with God. We serve because God loves us, not to earn God's love. We witness because we have received God's mercy. We persevere because the Spirit who descended at the Jordan dwells in us still.

At the start of every new year, many voices compete to define us — expectations, resolutions, regrets, fear, family & cultural pressures, ambition. Baptism speaks a deeper word, the steady voice of God's grace. Before we act, before we succeed or stumble, God has claimed us as God's own.

And the same Spirit who descended like a dove continues to lead us — sometimes into clarity, sometimes into the wilderness — but always deeper into faith. So today, as we remember the Baptism of our Lord, we also remember our own baptisms. We stand again at the waters. And so, let me end in prayer:

Lord, keep us faithful when the way is unclear, ever-rooted as those born of water & the Spirit. When the world's voices grow loud & distracting, may the words you once spoke over Jesus echo in our hearts throughout this year & always: "You are my beloved child. With you I am well pleased." Amen.