

Christ the King | Houston

Sermon 1.11.26

Matthew 3:13-17

Matt Kindsvatter

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

My name is Matt Kindsvatter and I have the wonderful opportunity to serve as the Executive Director at Lutherhill Ministries located in La Grange and on Galveston Island. Lutherhill Ministries was founded in 1954 and has served as a place set apart for children and adults in La Grange for the past 72 years and on Galveston Island for the past 12 years. The heart of our ministry is to provide transformational summer camp experiences for youth of all ages. Summer Camp is an intentional time set apart to experience the love of Christ in unique setting and new ways. Last summer of 1,500 kids got to experienced that gift. This mission comes to life as we live, play, worship and celebrate community together.

This good work is not just for children, your own Christ the King staff and council just spent a couple days out at Lutherhill | Galveston dreaming, planning and preparing for a new year of ministry together. At the retreat center in Lutherhill La Grange we welcomed the Synod Council and staff. Next weekend, we welcome our Mother-Daughter Retreat. Please know that you are always welcome at Lutherhill – in La Grange and Galveston.

It is my pleasure to be with you today to celebrate the baptism of our Lord as I bring a word of gratitude to the CTK community for all the ways that y'all love and support Lutherhill. The partnership that Lutherhill and Christ the King have is broad and deep. From the campers to retreat guests that come out to the hill and the beach. To the leadership of all ages that make Lutherhill a better place – from summer staff to board members, committee leaders and beyond. I am so grateful for you. Thank you for your generous partnership in meaningful ministry.

GOOD NEWS

And now – even more Good News. This is the first Sunday after Epiphany, throughout the season of Epiphany we hear Good News of great joy as Jesus is revealed to the world.

Throughout the season of Epiphany, we hear stories of Jesus revealed. Each week a new light is cast on his identity. Each week it's as if another spotlight is turned on and a new aspect of Jesus character and capacity is made known.

FLASHLIGHTS AT CAMP

It makes me think of the happy campers that come out to Lutherhill each summer. For many, it's their first experience holding the intense power of a flashlight. Our very patient counselors teach a session on flashlight etiquette every Sunday night. What is flashlight etiquette you ask?

- You can point it at the ground, you can point it at the sky,
- not in your neighbors face or your own face.
- You can point it at the song board in worship so we can all sing together.

Of course, this means that every flashlight wielding camper aims their torch at the song board that first night. Each dim light works together to illuminate the words as we sing together.

GOSPEL

In our Gospel reading - Jesus comes to the Jordan River, where John is baptizing. Crowds have gathered, seeking repentance and renewal. And then Jesus steps forward—not to watch, but to be baptized. John is stunned: “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus insists: “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.”

And as Jesus rises from the water, the heavens open, the Spirit descends like a dove, and a voice declares:

“This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

In that moment, Jesus is publicly named and claimed by God: **Son, Beloved, Pleasing.** This is not just a private affirmation—it’s a declaration of identity and mission. Before Jesus preaches a sermon, heals the sick, or calls disciples, God says: “You are mine.”

And that’s what happens in our baptism. Whether we remember the day or not, God spoke over us:

“You are my child. You are beloved. You belong to me.”

Our worth doesn’t come from what we achieve, how perfect we are, or what others say about us. It comes from God’s voice at the waters of baptism.

Baptism Sends Us Into the World

Notice what happens next in Jesus’ story: baptism is not the end—it’s the beginning. Immediately after this moment, Jesus is led into the wilderness, then into ministry. Baptism is a launching point.

The same is true for us. Baptism is the entry point to a lifetime of faith. We are named and claimed **for a purpose:**

- To live as Christ’s hands and feet in the world.
- To speak words of hope where there is despair.
- To love as we have been loved.

Martin Luther said we should “remember our baptism daily.” Why? Because every day we need to remember who we are and whose we are—especially when the world tries to tell us otherwise.

CAMP

Now, I know I am biased, but I firmly believe that camp is a unique place to remember our worth in God’s eyes and to see ourselves and others in a new light. Many of our Summer

Staffers call Lutherhill ‘home’. They say it’s the one place they truly feel like the very best version of themselves.

It is pure joy to watch a new camper shed the weight of social expectations from school or home. When they stop worrying about being ‘cool’ and just focus on being present. A whole new part of their character and capacity is revealed, and I can see the love of Christ shining through them.

At camp, we step away from the noise of everyday life and enter a space where God’s voice can be heard more clearly. Around campfires, in worship under the stars, through laughter and community, campers experience what it means to be **named and claimed by God**.

Camp is a living reminder of baptism:

- It’s where young people hear, maybe for the first time, “You are beloved.”
- It’s where they practice their baptismal call—serving others, caring for creation, and building relationships rooted in Christ.
- It’s where faith becomes real, not just words, but a way of life.

Camp matters because it nurtures disciples who will go back into the world ready to live their baptismal calling.

CONCLUSION

Here is my hope for you today

- May you know – and believe – that you are a beloved Child of God.
- May you live out your baptismal promises each and every day
- May you continue to seek Christ, revealed in ordinary and extraordinary ways

Grace and peace to you, friends. Amen.