



Baptism of Jesus: Holy Baptisms and Ingathering Sunday

Isaiah 42:1-9 ; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17 || January 11, 2026 || St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA 02339 || The Reverend Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

Happy New Year! Happy first Sunday of Epiphany! I'm just back from vacation – and am so pleased to share this exciting and full morning together. I am so grateful to gather in person or on-line, in this sacred community to celebrate the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan by John the Baptist, to baptize our own four new members into the body of Christ – Dillon, Benjamin, Lucy and Olivia (and if we are lucky, we'll have a little assistance from Dillon's sister Nathalie and friends) and we will collect and give thanks for all of the pledges that are being invested and given to St. Andrew's in hope and in love for the year ahead.

Our sanctuary also holds space for whatever large or small emotions or experiences you bring with you this morning, especially any residue or reservations you may have after the ICE action in Minneapolis last week and the resulting vigils and protests spreading across the country. Frankly, whatever the news of this week has evoked for you and for your loved ones is welcome and belongs here because we are called to bring our full selves to church!

Why would Jesus be baptized? In our gospel story this morning, John the Baptist doesn't ask it so directly, but questions whether he is the guy to do the job. "Why would I baptize you – you should baptize me, Jesus", says John the Baptist, challenging Jesus' request. And this is where Jesus explains to John the Baptist, and to each of us, why his own baptism was crucial. Jesus is being baptized in order to "fulfill all righteousness" or in order to do all things necessary to fulfill God's calling for Jesus.

“To fulfill all righteousness” goes both ways. Jesus has John the Baptist baptize him – affirming John’s own call and gift from God as a baptizer – and Jesus is baptized so that he can fulfill his own divine calling.

In modern parlance, Jesus is baptized, and we continue the sacred act of baptism so that each of God’s baptized people can fulfill their calling, or can grow into their full and authentic selves, into the full stature of Christ.

Among the blessings of the season of Epiphany – or the “AHA” season, is the invitation to experience God in our lives, to look around, take stock and assess what our God given gifts and talents are and what our purpose and calling might be in this world that needs us.

We are baptizing Benjamin, Lucy, Olivia and Dillon as a step in their own embodiment of God’s call for them, and we are promising as the body of Christ, to help them learn what their gifts and talents are and what God is asking and needs from each of them. We are doing that by beginning with ourselves. Each of us, as we renew our own baptismal covenants are promising to be drawn into a time of self-examination, reflection and action fueled by love and a call for justice for all.

We are affirming our own commitment to growth and discovery of our gifts, and this morning we are joining together to gather and bless the gifts that we are offering and investing at St. Andrew’s so that this work of fulfilling all righteousness, or growing, uncovering and using our gifts will continue as a gathered and committed parish community.

If this self-reflection feels daunting or not a great fit for your busy calendar or personal schedule, or you haven’t the foggiest idea where to start, perhaps a reflection on the last declaration of this morning’s gospel is a great place to ground yourself. God declares, “this is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased”.

This is such a profound gift. God declaring love and delight with Jesus simply based on Jesus’ existence. Jesus has not yet embarked on his public ministry. He has not healed people, achieved fame, infamy or notoriety. God delights in the simple fact of his being.

That is what we are reenacting and being reminded of as we baptize our children this morning. God delights, loves and is well pleased with Olivia, Lucy, Benjamin and Dillon and with each of us even before we have

discovered and applied our gifts and talents. God offers grace and love and mercy to each of us, unearned and freely given, and the question we consider, especially during the season of Epiphany is – what does this profound gift mean to us?

What would it mean in your life if upon waking you recited or read or reviewed this simple and earthshattering phrase? “I am God’s beloved, with whom God is well pleased?” How might that impact the choices or words or actions that you take during the day?

As we continue with this morning’s service, please keep this notion in mind, perhaps as the thread connecting each of our baptismal promises that we will reaffirm shortly.

And here is a spoiler alert – five weeks from now, when we gather to celebrate the LAST Sunday of Epiphany and the transfiguration of Jesus, we will be offered the exact same divine declaration, with a bit of spice at the end of it. God declares “this is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased” the spicy coda or attention grabbing addition is, as though a parent to God’s children, God adds - “LISTEN TO HIM!”

What might it look like for each of us to reiterate or remind or reflect upon this gift of belovedness? Might we bravely consider what our gifts are and how we are offering them to the world? Would it embolden each of us to consider what God’s call is to each of us? Though we have the same mandate to love and convey mercy, seeking justice and loving our neighbors, we each have our specific God given or nurtured talents to bring to our call. Is there an opportunity during this season of Epiphany to explore or uncover them? Is there an opportunity to give ourselves the gift of an “aha” or two between now and Lent? I hope so!

As a community, we will offer to make space for these children to grow into their full and beloved selves. We will acknowledge and celebrate their gifts even as they invest their trust and time in this community.

It is a blessing to offer them the gift of baptism this morning and to lovingly welcome them with delight and awe.

Amen+