**January 10. 2021** (First Sunday after Epiphany – Baptism of the Lord)

**St. Gabriel Church**

Genesis 1:1-5, Acts 19:1-7, Mark 1:4-11

**Opening Prayer:** O Lord, we pray, speak in this place, in the calming of our mind and in the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the thoughts that we form. Speak, O Lord, for your servants are listening. Amen

[Portia Nelson, was an American singer/songwriter, actress and author](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portia_Nelson).  She played the overly critical Sister Berthe who was always, finding fault with Maria in the 1965 movie, “The Sound of Music”!

She was the author of one of my favorite books…

**An Autobiography in Five Chapters**

Chapter 1  
I walk down the street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I fall in. I am lost….I am helpless.  
It isn’t my fault.  
It takes forever to find a way out.

Chapter 2  
I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the side walk.  
I pretend I don’t see it. I fall in again.  
I can’t believe I am in the same place.  
But it isn’t my fault.  
It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter 3  
I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I see it is there.  
I fall in….it’s a habit…but my eyes are open.  
I know where I am. It is my fault.  
I get out immediately.

Chapter 4  
I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it is there.  
I walk around it.

Chapter 5  
I walk down a different street.

(Pause)

I consciously choose a *different* path.

Today we commemorate the baptism of the Lord which marked the beginning of his chosen path.

And we reflect on our own baptism as it is described in our BCP: *Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, but it is also a sign of* ***Regeneration or New-Birth****, whereby, we are grafted into the Church; with the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons and daughters of God.*

*By the Holy Ghost, we are visibly signed and sealed; Faith is confirmed, and Grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God.*

In other words, we become *different* and are marked to travel a *different street*.

Baptism is a powerful force in the life of a Christian for two reasons. It is something we share in common. Christians all over the world can say that they were baptized in Christ. You met a Catholic in Ireland. He was baptized. You met a Pentecostal in Nigeria. She was baptized. The second reason Baptism is a powerful force is that baptism marks our entry into the death of Christ that we may gain eternal life.

In order for the Sacrament of baptism to be valid, it must meet 3 requirements:

1. Application of water – whether by pouring or by immersion.
2. Use of the Trinitarian formula. The minister declares that the person is being baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

In other words, it is a “washing with natural water with the invocation of the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

1. Must be intentional. Certainly on the part of the minister, but especially by the recipient. [If not an adult, then by the parents commitment to raise the child up].

We heard in our OTreading - Genesis 2: the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep… For those who have not yet discovered the light of Christ, their spirit remains a *formless void, roaming in the darkness.* [Story of young man whose parents had not introduced him to God]

In Acts, we find Paul confronting some disciples about their baptism and not knowing the Holy Spirit. They replied that had been baptized by John with the baptism of repentance. But they had not been baptized in the name of the Lord. Once they were and Paul laid hands upon them the Holy Spirit came upon them. So up until that point they had not received the fullness of Baptism. In the fullness of Baptism they were empowered with the gifts for ministry: tongues for praise and prophecy for witness. By virtue of our baptism we are called to be witnesses for Christ.

In our Gospel reading: Mark begins his Gospel account with “*the beginning of the Good News…”* re-introducing us to Jesus cousin, John, Elizabeth and Zechariah’s son. Mark makes no mention of Jesus’ birth. Mark focuses on **the radical transformation** of Jesus at the time of his baptism!

At the age of 30, at the moment of a simple ritual of living water – Jesus is changed. No longer just the carpenter’s son, no longer a refugee in Egypt, no longer just another human being to walk the face of the earth.

He goes forth teaching in synagogues, healing the sick, and making the dead live again. He preaches and manifests miracles. He astounded people with his teaching and confounds us even to this day by submitting to a shameful death on a cross.

Making us wanting and waiting for His second coming. Here we are 2,000 years later and we are still waiting and gathering in this church excited about the possibility of his, not the possibility, but of his coming again.

Today’s over-arching message for all of us is that Baptism is **transformative**, it makes us a different people. It takes one down a different path. And sometimes we forget that. Sometimes our baptism was so long ago, we forgot it. And then we come to church and the light bulb goes off and we are being transformed every time, even this very moment. It calls us to be aware of the very presence of the Holy Spirit within our lives. It is the mark of every Christian and recognized as *THE Sacrament* in every Christian church.

In his baptism, Jesus appears to have become an entirely different person. It is as if the waters washed away what was hiding the true Jesus. The running water somehow changed him, made him manifest as who he truly is, and given him the power and inspiration that began his mission and ministry that forever changed the world.

**S**o, too our baptism:

1. Oh, none of us is the Christ, but **each and every one of us** *is the beloved, with whom God is well pleased. Each and everyone of us.*
2. *And* ***each and every one of us*** *was forever changed and transformed in our baptism.*
3. And **each and every one of us** *continues to be changed and transformed – in ways big and small – throughout our earthly ministry*

Now filled with the Holy Spirit, we – like Jesus – are commissioned and sent forth *to proclaim the good news of God’s favor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the broken victims go free, to proclaim that God’s time is NOW, this very moment.*

That is our job: *to live baptismally.*

To know that we have been changed by acknowledging God’s work in our lives.

That our true and holy life has been revealed by the washing away of all stain of sin

That we are grafted into the body of Christ’s Church

That we have been given an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and love God, and the gift of joy and wonder in all God’s works.

Baptism comes with an awesome responsibility

we are no longer simply ordinary people.

And that’s the challenge, because sometimes we fall into this… routine…

Baptism comes with an awesome responsibility…

1. We are to **boldly confess** Jesus as our Lord and Savior
2. We are to **strive for justice and peace**
3. And to **seek and serve** Christ in everyone we meet.

Even in times of Covid. Even in times when we have to say we can’t say we can’t gather together. And that’s the biggest challenge of all. Especially in this time of Covid. And I hate it. I hated yesterday when I had to make a Zoom call and say what are we gonna do? So I’m putting it back on you! By virtue of our baptismal call, what are we gonna do? Remember last week when I said, “Code Blue?” Well, Code Blue just upped its ante. What are we gonna do? And God said, “We are all in this together. Live up to your Baptismal Call.”

Those of us who profess and call ourselves Christian are called to travel a different path, because we can’t keep falling into the same hole. We need to take a different street…

One of *grateful thanksgiving* in the face of victory and defeat

One of *difficult forgiveness* – in the face of bitter betrayal

Because we thought the vaccine was going to come and we thought it was coming to be a quick and immediate cure. The ropes would be gone and we would all be sitting here. Right?

One of *ongoing repentance* – in the face of chronic mistakes.

We’ve got to come up with a different plan.

Most of us were baptized as children, infants. Our parents and godparents made professions of faith for us.

But here’s what I’m offering folks, I don’t have any snake oil. And I don’t have a magic wand. But this is what I got. But I’m offering today an opportunity for all of us to renew our Baptismal Covenant without having an answer. But God’s got the answer and it’s the same answer He gave us when He said, “I’m forming a new earth out of a formless wasteland and if you believe follow me. And if you believe, follow me.” I believe God’s got the answer and I don’t. And I’m gonna trust. Because He hasn’t failed me yet. And I still don’t know the answer. But I’m still following. So you going to join me? So here’s what I’m going to do?

For those of you at home, if you have your BCP handy, page 304 is the Baptismal Covenant, those present it’s in your bulletin.

I invite you to stand (if you are able) and join me in renewing your Baptismal Covenant… Lord we don’t have the answer, but you do…

And so I ask our St. Gabriel family…..

*Celebrant* Do you believe in God the Father?

*People* I believe in God, the Father almighty,

creator of heaven and earth.

*Celebrant* Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

*People* I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit

and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

*Celebrant* Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

*People* I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting.

*Celebrant* Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and

fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the

prayers?

*People* I will, with God’s help.

*Celebrant* Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever

you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

*People* I will, with God’s help.

*Celebrant* Will you proclaim by word and example the Good

News of God in Christ?

*People* I will, with God’s help.

*Celebrant* Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving

your neighbor as yourself?

*People* I will, with God’s help.

*Celebrant* Will you strive for justice and peace among all

people, and respect the dignity of every human

being?

*People* I will, with God’s help.

Grant, O Lord, that all who are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ your Son may live in the power of his resurrection and look for him to come again in glory; who lives and reigns now and for ever. Amen

And by the grace of the Holy Spirit we hear: "You are my Sons and Daughters, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Amen