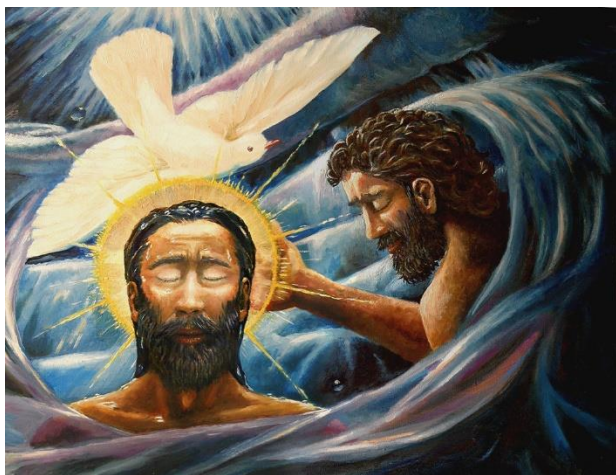


JANUARY 9, 2022 BAPTISM OF THE LORD



**St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL
397-6323**

***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

Sisters and brothers, today we recall:
Jesus came to the waters of baptism.

**In baptism, our Creator claims us and frees us from
the power of hatred and death.**

In baptism we are joined to Christ and we are joined
together in unity, recalling

**All: “There is no longer Jew or Greek
there is no longer slave or free
there is no longer male or female
for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”**

In baptism, the Spirit of God anoints us for ministry
and makes us signs of divine love.
It is the mark of acceptance into the church
and the beginning of our growth into full Christian
faith and discipleship.

**All: Therefore, on this day, the whole church, the
Body of Christ, remembers and celebrates.**

Let us worship God!

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

(based on Isaiah 43: 1-2)

**Gracious God, we confess that too often we live
as though we are fearful, not faithful.**

**When we encounter the waters of chaos and
confusion, we don't easily pass through them,
but we obsess about the height of the water
instead of the sight of the other side.**

**You promised to walk through the rivers with us.
Help us believe. And help our unbelief.**

***RESPONSIVE ASSURANCE OF GRACE:**

Thus says the God who created you and formed us in
God's image: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.”

This is the good news!

All: I belong to God.

READING FROM THE BOOK OF ISAIAH 43:1-7

bringing us hope and comfort.

43: 1 But now, says the LORD— the one who created you, Jacob, the one who formed you, Israel:

Don't fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name; you are mine.

²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; when through the rivers, they won't sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you won't be scorched and flame won't burn you.

³I am the LORD your God, the holy one of Israel, your savior. I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place.

⁴Because you are precious in my eyes, you are honored, and I love you. I give people in your place, and nations in exchange for your life.

⁵Don't fear, I am with you.

From the east I'll bring your children;

from the west I'll gather you.

⁶I'll say to the north, "Give them back!" and to the south, "Don't detain them." Bring my sons from far away,

and my daughters from the end of the earth,

⁷ everyone who is called by my name

and whom I created for my glory,

whom I have formed and made.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22**

¹⁵The people were filled with expectation, and everyone wondered whether John might be the Christ. ¹⁶John replied to them all, "I baptize you with water, but the one who is more powerful than me is coming. I'm not worthy to loosen the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷The shovel he uses to sift the wheat from the husks is in his hands. He will clean out his threshing area and bring the wheat into his barn. But he will burn the husks with a fire that can't be put out."

²¹When everyone was being baptized, Jesus also was baptized. While he was praying, heaven was opened ²²and the Holy Spirit came down on him in bodily form like a dove. And there was a voice from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness."

Hear the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “Who Do We Belong To?”

Before I talk about our Gospel lesson, I wanted to clarify some things about Bible study and exploring the passages. First of all, as you may know, each of the four Gospels is different. Each author had a different reason, agenda, audience, context, resources, and research for writing the life and teachings of Jesus. None of the authors were eye witnesses to the life of Jesus. None of them ever met Jesus. Their resources came from other people who had met Jesus; eye witnesses like the original disciples or someone who had close knowledge of Jesus. *(We must remember that the four Gospels were written 30 – 40 years after the resurrection of Jesus, however they could have been collecting information much earlier. No one knows for sure.)* The authors thus took those stories and teachings of Jesus, interpreted this information to their liking and put them together for what we now call a book.

What was written down by the authors of Matthew, Mark, and Luke were not exactly the same. We talked about the birth narrative during Advent; each one was a little different. There are other examples of where in Jesus’ life they put certain events. The clearing of the temple in the Gospel of John happened right after the wedding at Cana. In

Luke it happened after Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as does Mark’s rendition.

Because of these differences sometimes it is difficult to remember which Gospel has which story. That’s why it is good to read all four Gospels to get a fuller image of God’s work.

With these differences, were any of them wrong? No. They all wrote what they had found out about Jesus. We can’t say any of them are wrong. How can we? We weren’t there.

So now we are here over 2000 years later trying to understand the Gospels. We are looking for meaning in the teachings of Jesus. No one has the absolute understanding of the Gospels. But, of course, many people have tried. Are all these books of commentaries wrong? No! They are different. They may give an interpretation that makes more sense to us than others. We all come to the Bible with our own biases, ideas, situations, and our own context. Each of us will hear the passages a little differently. Are we wrong? No. And, what I find fascinating is each time I read the same passage, I hear it a little differently. Different words stand out which I didn’t notice before. It’s as if God is revealing to each of us a different message. That’s the Holy Spirit speaking to us.

Is there a wrong way to interpret the Bible? Yes! That's why it is a good idea to say a little prayer before you read the Bible. God will guide you. It's also beneficial to have some understanding of who God and Jesus are. This basic knowledge is an anchor we can hold on to if we drift too far away.

Personally, I call it making sense to me. When I read of a particular interpretation of a Bible passage, I test it against my anchor. It may be an interpretation I never heard before; does it make me say "aha" or "eek!" Perhaps that is what you think sometimes also. And remember that you have free will and you don't have to agree with anyone, especially what I talk about from the pulpit. I try to give you something to think about. Maybe it inspires you. Maybe you scratch your head and say, "I need to think about that." That's what I like about the United Church of Christ. We have no dogmas. You have a brain. You can make your own decisions.

The UCC does have some basic beliefs, such as Jesus is the head of the church. (*No Bishop. No Cardinals. No Pope.*)

In the UCC we believe Jesus is love. Love God and your neighbor. Pray for peace and justice in the world. (*The next time you are in the sanctuary, turn around and read the banner that says "Be the Church". That about covers it.*)

What led up to my diatribe was a discussion I read concerning the reason why Jesus requested a baptism of repentance. Did Jesus have sins he needed washed away? The answers I found were a little "out there". I'm still processing. Do you have an answer? We can each have different answers. No one knows everything.

As the psalmist writes, each of us belong to God. God invites all of us to stay close to God and we will be led to God's truth; the only truth that really counts. Amen.

REMEMBERING OUR BAPTISMAL PROMISES:

Do you promise, by the grace of God, to be a disciple, to follow in the way of Jesus Christ, to resist oppression, to show love and justice, and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ, as best you are able?

If so, say "I do."

And do you promise, according to the grace given to you, to grow in your faith and to be a faithful member of the church, celebrating Christ's presence and furthering God's mission in all the world?

If so, say "I do."

REAFFIRMATION OF BAPTISM:

As you receive the baptismal water, say out loud,
“I am God’s beloved!”

PRAYER OF RECOMMITMENT:

**By your Spirit, Almighty God, Grant us
Love for others, Joy in serving you, Peace in
disagreement, Patience in suffering,
Kindness toward all people, Goodness in evil times,
Faithfulness in temptation, Gentleness in the face of
opposition, Self-control in all things.
Then strengthen us for ministry in your name.
Amen.**

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with a time for silent
personal prayer.

God of mystery. God of wisdom. We have so many
questions. Perhaps that is part of the mystery. We
don’t need to know everything. We don’t need to
have the wisdom of God. We know we are loved by
You. We know you care about each of us. We just
ask that you guide us on this journey called life.
Teach us how to love as You love. Teach us what we
need to know to do Your will. Teach us to serve
others and pray for those who are lost, in pain,
lonely, grieving, hungry, thirsty, and those in harm’s
way. Teach us to be peace makers.

We also pray for all those affected by the cold
weather, marooned on highways in the snow, or
huddled in a home without heat. We pray for those
affected by storms and tornadoes.

Hold all us close to your heart and we remain close
to the heart of Jesus as we pray . . .

THE LORD’S PRAYER:

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your
name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on
earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily
bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our
debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but
deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and
the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

***BENEDICTION:**

Remember this week whose you are. And remember,
“When you pass through the waters, I will be with
you; and through the rivers, they shall not
overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall
not be burned, and the flame shall not consume
you.” Go in the peace of Christ.

Thanks be to God!

CONGRATULATIONS TO Becky and Larry Reiss on the
birth of their Grandson, Otto, whose parents are
Jessica and Scott Killian.