

Year A – Baptism of our Lord – January 11, 2026
Pastor Megan Floyd
Matthew 3:13-17

Grace and peace to you from God and the Holy Spirit, and from Jesus Christ, the beloved, whose light and love we follow. Amen.

I knew this boy many years ago... he was kind of a goofball, and no one took him very seriously. He struggled in school, and he blamed his low grades on not being very smart.

I don't think his family, his teachers, or even he himself... expected much from his life. He was entering his teenage years when I first met him, and he was already getting into trouble... apparently, no one was surprised.

His family had a lot going on... health problems, which caused money problems, and so it goes on down the line. There was a lot of instability... and I think this boy was just falling through the cracks.

He was living into the story he was told about himself... that he was a screw-up and not much more... so why expect more?

We have several educators in this congregation, and so I suspect that many of you are familiar with both the Pygmalion and the Golem Effects.

These opposite effects describe how either positive or negative expectations and words affect our self-image... our confidence... and the standards we hold ourselves to.

As much as we would like to believe we build our self-image independently, the truth is... how we see ourselves is a story that is written in collaboration with others.

That's just human...

And so, I think it matters greatly that Jesus begins his ministry on earth with an act of solidarity with humanity... by entering into our human need for repentance and renewal by entering into John's baptism... and that we then hear God's voice from the heavens...

"This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

He is called... the beloved. That's a powerful word.

Jesus came alongside us... alongside humanity... in his choice to share in our baptism. I think we all agree that, as the son of God... Word of God incarnate... he didn't *need* to experience a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of personal sins.

And yet, Jesus insists... he must do this... this was not an action he needed for his own forgiveness, but rather, to be in solidarity with us, who do need it.

And to acknowledge that our sins are not only personal, but also communal. John the Baptist was calling *Israel* to repentance... to repent of the sins of the community... that we are all, either directly or indirectly, complicit.

Jesus entered the waters of baptism to be what he is... *God with us*... and to show us that, motivated by grace and mercy, *God chooses us*.

And so, we also enter the waters of baptism to receive this beautiful gift of renewal and adoption into God's family... a gift freely given by God.

This is a gift given without qualifications, conditions, or demands... It's not a reward for our actions... it is not given because we are good... but it is given only because *God is good*.

And it is a gift given in love... because God is love.

We are always on the receiving end of God's mercy and promise... and that through water and the *words* of God's promise... we, too, are called beloved... and we, too, are claimed as God's children.

Through the water and God's holy words of our baptism, we enter into life with Christ... and in Christ... we are made new through grace.

Jesus is a teacher who leads by example... Jesus shows us the way of love, humility, and solidarity... and then invites us to accompany him on that way.

People become... we become... what we are called. God called us into existence with God's words... God spoke and breathed life... and so we became living, breathing humans...

And now... through water... and God's word... we are washed clean, and claimed as children of the most high... and we are called... beloved.

God calls you... beloved... so you are... beloved.

This is an important and beautiful description of who you are... it's why I remind you every week... to become aware of God's gaze of love upon you.

And yet, even as we know this word... defines us... we understand that it also invites us to live up to... and live into our belovedness. It sets love as the standard by which we live.

We know that being claimed and loved by God, and holding that in the forefront of our minds... always... helps us to live, and act, and love our neighbors in a way that is befitting of one who is themselves... beloved.

The words of God's promise... the words of God's love... go to work on us... these words and this promise give us the strength and courage to confess and repent of that which holds us apart from God...

they help us to change our hearts and minds daily and to turn back toward Jesus... and toward love.

Jesus' powerful act of solidarity with us... his choice to enter into our baptism as one of us... calls us to live as beloved members of the full body of Christ... and it means we can rise to the expectations of one who lives their life *for* Christ... and *in* Christ.

To live into our belovedness means that each day, we work to live lives, not of presumption or arrogance, but of humility... and solidarity... and companionship...

lives of unassuming generosity, not looking down on others, but seeing them as Jesus would see them... as siblings in Christ... who are also beloved.

That boy I knew all those years ago... I was fortunate to watch him connect with an incredible mentor who refused to let the story he had heard before be the only story that boy ever heard.

This mentor made certain that a better, more positive, and loving story became louder than the old one, and I saw this boy start to believe in himself.

I saw him start living like one who was loved... like one who belonged, who was valuable, and who was worthy of love... and I saw how it shaped his interactions with others.

I saw his kindness and humor shine through, his patience while helping others, and his compassion for those who were suffering.

His life was reset and renewed... he was reminded that he was a child of God... and that he was beloved.

God calls us all beloved... and so... we become beloved. It's a powerful word.

My hope and prayer for you today is that you remember your baptism... as often as you can... remember the words of love and promise that God spoke to you...

The promise that you are a beloved child of God.

And if you aren't baptized, then know that God's invitation is always open... God's arms are always open wide, longing to receive you in love.

Because our baptism... is not a transaction with God... it is an acknowledgment of what God is already doing in and through you.

Remember that through the water and word of God's promise, you are part of the full body of Christ, and that you will never look upon another whom God does not love.

Remember that you are so loved... and let that go to work in you this day and all days... let it be what you live into each day, for yourself and those around you.

Author Maria Popova wrote, "...love... is the work of mirroring and magnifying each other's light. Gentle work. Steadfast work. Life-saving work in those moments when life and shame and sorrow occlude our own light from our view, but there is still a clear-eyed loving person to beam it back. In our best moments, we are that person for another."

Remember that you washed clean in the waters of baptism, and that you are beloved... and that to be one who is beloved... means to reflect love into the world.

So let it be that we all might shine with this love. Amen.

Maria Popova, *The Marginalian*, <https://www.themarginalian.org/2022/01/31/james-baldwin-nothing-personal-love/>