

"Children of God"

Pastor Rich Knight
Trinitarian Congregational Church
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Matthew 3:13-17

We're going to read the account of Jesus' baptism, performed by John the Baptist. William Barclay notes in his commentary that prior to this time in Israel only converts to Judaism were baptized. Jews were never baptized. But just before the public ministry of Jesus begins a spiritual revival is taken place out in the wilderness lead by John; and folks are being baptized as a sign of commitment, dedication and devotion to God. Let's take a look:

Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

I once received a Christmas card that said this about the Christmas event: *"He became what we are, so that we may become what he is."* I opened it up and on the inside it read, *"A Child of God."* "He became what we are, so that we may become what he is. A Child of God." That is actually a quote from a 2nd C. bishop named, St. Irenaeus of Lyons. Irenaeus put it this way: *God "became what we are in order to make us what he is."* Christ became a child of this earth that we might become children of heaven, sons & daughters of God.

Now, of course, every human being is a child of God. Christians simply have the advantage of knowing that. And we have it on good authority, from Christ himself.

Tony Campolo tells the story of teaching a sociology class at the University of Pennsylvania. Somehow the subject of Christianity and Christ came up. Tony mentioned that Christians have long been drawn to ministry with the poor and outcasts because Jesus himself seemed drawn to hanging out with outcasts himself - notorious sinners, tax collectors and prostitutes. With that a Jewish student in the class spoke up and said, "Jesus never met a Prostitute." Dr. Campolo replied, "No it's right there in the scriptures, 'She was a sinful woman.'" The student said, "Jesus never met a prostitute, because when he encountered a woman involved in prostitution he didn't see a prostitute in front of him. He saw a child of God."

Christ became a child of this earth to teach us that we're all children of God. That's at the heart of baptism. We're celebrating that Julian, Zoe and Nathaniel are children of God. They've come from God. They belong to God. They're part of God's family. They're to live as God's children. And they enjoy the blessings of God and the unconditional acceptance of God.

When Jesus was baptized God the Father spoke to God the Son, *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* When the early church chose baptism as the initiation rite into the church they were symbolizing this very truth - that just as Jesus was a child of this earth he was also a child of God - and so are we. Just as Christ enjoyed the pleasure of God's favor - so do we. *"This is my beloved son."* In choosing baptism as the sacrament to mark entrance into the church they were saying we all are children of God, with whom God is well pleased.

What I love about this truth is it gives us not only a wonderful sense of identity, but it also expresses our calling - to live like children of God.

The Broadway Musical *"Man of La Mancha"* tells the story of Don Quixote and Dulcinea. Don Quixote falls for a rather wayward, Aldonza, whom he

falls in love with and renames "Dulcinea." Later on she returns to her old, sinful ways, and Don Quixote says to her, "*Dulcinea. remember who you are. You're Dulcinea.*"

Our job is to remember who we are and then to live as those who have a new name - Christ-ian - to live as children of God.

Let me close with a story and then a guided meditation.

One of my favorite preachers, Fred Craddock, tells the story of a day he met a man named Ben Hooper. Mr. Hooper was having breakfast at a table next to Professor Craddock and his wife. They struck up a conversation and it came out that Craddock was a preacher. "I've got a story to tell you about a preacher." And he told him about growing up in a small town in the Bible belt, and that his mother was a very colorful character in the town. She was not married when Ben Hooper was born, and there was talk that she wasn't even sure who the father was. Back then in the Bible Belt this was absolutely scandalous. When Ben was a child he began to attend a Baptist Church next to the apartment where he and his mother lived. He enjoyed the service but used to sneak out to avoid talking with anyone. One Sunday he got held up in the crowd and couldn't get out in time. It was then that he felt a hand on his shoulder. It was the preacher's hand.

The pastor said, "Now boy, I know you. You've been coming to our services for a while now. I think I know who you are. Why boy, you're a child of . . ." (in the south you're often referred to as Jesse's boy, Joe's son) "Why boy, you're a child of . . ." And then he remembered who he was and what people said about him. "Why boy, you're a child . . . of God. And I see a striking resemblance! Now go, Son, and claim your inheritance."

Ben Hooper claimed his inheritance, his identity as a child of God. He went to college, became an attorney, went into politics and became a two-term governor of Tennessee. He got a new story that day, a new identity, as a Child of God, and it served him well.

Guided Meditation

Please be in a spirit of prayer and picture this in your mind.

You're walking through a forest, along a winding dirt path.

It's a lush, green forest, with beams of sunlight streaking through the tall trees.

Eventually you come to a beautiful clearing.

Green, green grass and wild flowers fill the area.

There's a log in the clearing.

Jesus is sitting on the log and a group of children are gathered around him.

You can see that he has a child on his lap.

You can't see the child's face but you can see that it's a moment of deep joy.

The child then hugs Jesus and Jesus embraces the child and turns slightly;

And then you see the child's face.

And you see that you are the child in Jesus' arms.

You are a child of God.

Let's close in prayer:

Loving God,

Thank You for this precious truth.

Thank You for your precious love.

Help us to live this day and every day as your sons and daughters. Amen.