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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church  
First Sunday after the Epiphany: The Baptism of Our Lord  
January 8, 2017  
Text: Isaiah 42:1-9, Matthew 3:13-17

*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.  
He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;  
a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not  
quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.  
He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the  
earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.*

The holidays are now officially over. The Christmas season has come to an end. Friday was the Feast of the Epiphany, the twelfth day of the Twelve Days of Christmas. The three kings that had been part of our nativity scenes have seen the Child lying in the manger and have already started their long journeys home. By another route, of course. And as have most of our out of town guests. New Year's Day has also come and gone. The Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus honored too. And I suspect that by now, most working adults but not all, have returned to work and perhaps the younger folks to school though some of our college aged students still linger for the last vestiges of their winter break.

Today, the Church, as it does at the beginning of every year and after the Feast of the Epiphany, celebrates the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord. His baptism is a reminder of new beginnings. It certainly was in Jesus' life.

The gospels all agree that this event marked the beginning of the public phase of his life. It was so important of an event that two of the gospels, Mark and John, begin with what happened at the River Jordan. Jesus' childhood and journey to adulthood remain obscure sans one brief narrative from the Gospel of Luke where readers are told the story of a twelve year old Jesus lost and found in Jerusalem and that "Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor" (Lk. 2:52).

And Matthew, whose gospel, leads us in a new lectionary cycle in this new year, fills in no gaps between what happened after the Holy Family fled to Egypt in order to avoid the murderous Herod and their arrival in

Nazareth to the day that Jesus himself walks along the bank of the River Jordan.

In our gospel, Jesus is now an adult and he approaches the place where crowds have gathered to hear John's message of repentance and to be baptized by him. John does not know what to make of his cousin's request for baptism because he believes that Jesus is the Promised One come into the world and certainly has no need of the baptism that John offers. Still, Jesus held firm, saying that this was the time to fulfill all righteousness. 'Let's do this, now.' Jesus said. "Do it. God's work, putting things right all these centuries, is coming together right now in this baptism."\* John does as Jesus asks and when Jesus came up out of the waters, the skies opened and God's Spirit descended on him and he was claimed and named once again, this time by his Heavenly Father. Jesus who is God incarnate has come to earth and he has been commissioned to be the servant described by the prophet Isaiah who comes in gentleness, not shouting or crying out in the streets, breaking no bruised reed, quenching no smoldering wick, or giving up when the going gets rough but rather one who will open eyes of the blind and soften stony hearts, release those who are bound, and give freedom to those held captive. The One who will make all things right.

Today, on Feast of the Baptism of our Lord, we reclaim our identity as God's beloved children and embrace the mission that belongs to those who share this identity. It was through baptism that we were reborn by the Spirit and named and claimed as God's own forever. Through our baptisms we are identified as brothers and sisters in Christ, as members of his Body, the Church, as Christ-bearers in the world.

Jesus' baptism was the beginning of his public ministry. Our baptisms remind us of our ministries and the work that we are to be about-striving for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being, and proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.

As we renew these promises, we will say: "I will, with God's help." Indeed, today, more than ever we need God's help to become the people that we were created to be, to become the people that our God calls us to be and to help others be who God created them to be.

Alone, we will struggle to make an impact in a world filled with uncertainties, chaos and hate. But we can, together and with God's help, put into practice that which proves greater any negativity and division-love, kindness, gentleness, humility, and faith. With God's help we can help heal our neighbor's pain that comes from our collective brokenness and from humankind's "isms" flung far and wide and help lift those who are bruised and battered by ignorance and fear. And we can help keep those small flames of hope and justice and peace stay lit despite the world's darkness.

Our baptisms bind us together, all of us, with the world and with all its messiness. And there is grace upon that God alone gives so that we as Christ-bearers may go about our witness, our missions, our servanthood to others and to all God's creation. So that we can do "God's work."

And God will say to us: *Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon YOU!*

Please stand and turn to page 292 in your Book of Common Prayer and let us pray...

\*"The Message" by Eugene H. Peterson