**Worship Devotion for January 10, 2021**

*We are starting a new season of Epiphany. Today we remember the baptism of our Lord. Set aside some time and space for this worship time. Do what you can to make it a sacred space and time. Also, have a bowl of water if you would like to take part in remembering your Baptism. If you would like to join our zoom time for fellowship just watch for the zoom information sent with these devotion guides. A suggestion: find a way to play some music during this time to begin this worship time and/or to end it. You can also go to our webpage* [*www.umchapelvalley.org*](http://www.umchapelvalley.org) *where there is a link to the Facebook page or go to the devotion page and there will be the recorded message of the week there or you can see it on You Tube that goes along with the devotion included here or you can go directly to our Facebook page,* [*www.facebook.com/chapelofthevalleyumc*](http://www.facebook.com/chapelofthevalleyumc)*. These are just aids to help you take some time to spend with God.*

**It Started with Water**

**Call to Worship**

Let us prepare our hearts as we remember the sacrament of baptism. Let us be filled with gratitude for God's amazing grace. Let us wade into the waters of love; and step into the rivers of blessing. Feel the waters of life; Know the joy of baptism; See the springs of eternal life; Sing of the triumph of God's blessing.

**Prayer**

Almighty God in heaven, at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan, you proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Grant that all who are baptized into his name may keep the covenant they have made. Bountiful God, on this day when we celebrate the baptism of our Lord, we come to you with thanksgiving for your precious gift of water. All water is holy, blessed by the You, the Creator. From birth waters to mighty rivers of justice, from a refreshing sip to the renewal of a quiet stream, all water is holy, a sign that we have passed through troubles, been refreshed by a gift we did not earn, sustained by a love poured over us. This water is a rainbow sign of God's continuing love at work in us and through us. Bless us and this gift of water. Loving God, just as you are able to use water for your sacred purposes, so we pray for you to cleanse and transform all of us as we remember our baptism as an instrument of grace and the foundation of our discipleship.

Holy and Loving God, your children and world are hurting. We see so many people who are sick and dying because of Covid and the pandemic. We see people losing their jobs, worrying about the basics such as food, a roof over their head, being able to see their families and friends. We see people of color, all colors and people who are judged for who they love, and people who live on the margins because of addictions and illnesses, who are treated unjustly. We see our country ripped apart because of lies and politics. We are angry and fearful and humiliated and yes, we are hurting. God come to us in this time. Refresh us as we remember that as Jesus came out of the water you called him Your beloved. Help us to see that we too our your beloved. Wrap us up with your grace and love.

Lord, in this new year, we pray that through your grace, hearts can be softened, old hurts can be released and a door might be opened to reconciliation. Let your grace and love grow in us and move through us reaching our neighbors. We lift our joys and give over our concerns, those we have spoken and those in our hearts, to your tender care as we now pray the prayer Jesus taught us…. Our Father….Amen.

**Scripture** *Acts 19:1-7*

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” Then he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John’s baptism.” Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied— altogether there were about twelve of them.

**Scriptures** *Mark 1:4-11*

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

**Devotion** *It Started with Water*

As I grew up, my mom would say to me as I left for dates or gatherings with my friends or school events, really when I left the house…my mom would say, “Remember who you are and what you represent.” She started saying that to our youth groups at the church and other youth organizations we were involved in. We would go ya, ya, ya and go on our merry way. But as we got older we started to think more about it. She then started adding the phrase, “Remember whose you are.” When I went to seminary and was talking about the sacraments, especially baptism….I really started to think again about the statements my mother would share…Remember who you are, whose you are and what you represent.

Today we celebrate the baptism of our Lord. In the Gospel story found in Mark, we learn the story of Jesus’ baptism by his cousin John. He strolls up to the shore of the Jordan and tells John he needs to be baptized. John is saying he is not worthy…. after all, he has been talking about the coming of Jesus his whole ministry. Yet, Jesus says he needs to be baptized to fulfill what has been said. So, John baptizes him and Jesus comes out of the water and the heavens open and Jesus is told that he is God’s son, he is beloved and God is pleased.

Our other scripture from the book of Acts is the story of Paul coming to people in Ephesus and asked them about their understanding of their baptisms. He wanted to see if they understood the power of the baptism through Jesus Christ. They understood the first part of the reconciliation of their sins but did not understood the power of the Holy Spirit. He shared with them the true understanding of their membership, their joining in the family of God through Christ by sharing the power of the Spirit.

So, why do we remember the baptism of the Lord or remember our baptism? Baptism happens once as an initiation into the family of God. Isn’t that we have been taught? Yet, baptism is so much more that that. As Paul asks the people he came across in Ephesus, “Into what then were you baptized?” We are baptized into the family of God. We are receiving an outward sign of an inward grace that is not earned. So, we remember who are…we remember whose we are…. And we remember what we represent. It starts with our baptism. And we need to be reminded of that every day. We need to remember we are a beloved child of God who is loved and we are a part of a family that expands to our neighbors…all of our neighbors. And we need to remember that we represent the Lord Jesus Christ as his siblings…. We need to act and live and love like he did…and when that becomes difficult, we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit that we received in our baptism.

And it starts with the water. A colleague, Chip Andrus said, “Every time you see water – like when it rains or you go to the river – remember God’s beauty and sustaining love all around us and remember that you are a baptized child of God.” In his church office, he has a bowl hanging from the wall as you enter to remember your baptism. He reminds his congregation that their baptism is the foundation of their discipleship. To wake up and remember that they are each a beloved child of God. They can then build on that foundation and become a person that is a sibling of Christ and can love God and love their neighbor.

And it all starts with water. Another colleague, Marva. J. Dawn, talks about being washed in grace through baptism. She shares a story of a church that starts the worship service with a four person processional…first, a person with a large pitcher of water that gets poured in a bowl with the statement made “waters of our identity”…..second, a person with a cup of wine and a plate of bread and the statement made “feast of our future”….third, a person carrying the Bible and states “the book of our story”…and fourth, a person who follows and comes to the front and says, “People of God, welcome home.” It goes through our discipleship – our identity, our future, our story and our welcome home. And it all starts with water and our identity of a beloved child of God. Remembering who we are, whose we are and what we represent.

Yes, our baptism happens once but it takes a lifetime to complete. It starts a lifelong pilgrimage towards holiness and righteousness. It begins a covenant relationship with God and God’s people. Now, God has done God’s work in the covenant. Where the pilgrimage for us is, is to keep our part of the covenant. And we must always start with the remembering of our baptism. Martin Luther when he was discouraged would splash water on him and declare “I am baptized.” John Calvin would say “I am still on my way.” And John Wesley would say, “Moving onto perfection.” Lawrence Mick wrote a column that he called “Living Wet.” We are living wet when we remember our baptism and live our lives as beloved children of God. And then say I am still on my way. And then move onto perfection. And it all starts with water, holy water.

These were the thoughts I wanted to share when I started this week and I was planning this service and meditation. I still believe everything I have shared and see that it is the foundation that we must always remember. Yet, as I was writing this, our nation’s capital was overtaken, at least for a while, by a rioting mob. I was horrified as I watched the images and was saddened and angry. All I could do was drop to my knees and pray for God to be with us. I starting to think I needed to change my message…. picturing looking at John the Baptist and to come in screaming you “Brood of Vipers”…yet the brood of vipers are all of us. It has become almost easier to just ignore it or blame others for it and not look at where we are at fault. Baptism talks about repentance and being washed clean. It starts there. Then we must move towards seeking peace with justice and mercy.

I do know this….Love will always win. God is always faithful. We must in humility and love seek reconciliation first with God and then with our neighbor and our enemy. So, splash yourself with water and say “I am baptized.” Then go out and love God and love neighbor.

**Special Music** (listen or read the words to this song) Words and music by Jim and Jean Strathdee

Water me, oh let me grow like the tallest tree. Water me, oh let your love fall on me.

Show your face to me, so I may walk in the light I see. Show your face to me, so I may know what you want me to be.

Hold my hand while I walking through this land. Hold my hand , let me fly with the angel band.

Rock my soul, oh when the mighty oceans roar. Rock my soul, never, never let me go.

Never, never let me go (repeat 3 x)

**A Blessing for Offerings**

*We invite you to take time to give thanks for offerings made. Again, you can make your tithes and offerings to the church by sending them in the mail, you can also drop it at the church during office hours or through Pastor office mailbox slot. You can also make a donation online at* [*www.umchapelvalley.org*](http://www.umchapelvalley.org)*. There are instructions for each method*

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**

God of love and hope, we bring our gifts to further your work and ministry of love in all the world. May our gifts bring hope and new opportunities to all. May our gifts and our lives bring great light into the pains and sorrows of the world. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Closing Prayer**

May God take you deep into rivers of blessing, lead you beside refreshing streams and anoint you with the waters of everlasting love. Amen.