

## SERMON 822

The First Sunday after the Epiphany

*The Baptism of Our Lord*

Sunday, January 12, 2014

928th Week as Priest

754th Week at St Dunstan's

19th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

## BAPTISM

*Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Holy Baptism is one of the seven Sacraments of our One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. If you want an easy way to remember them, try this: Be calm. Are you? B-E-C-O-M-R-U. Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Ordination, Marriage, Reconciliation (the modern name for Private Confession), and Unction (Prayers for the Sick and Last Rites). Be calm. Are you?

Holy Baptism is first among the Sacraments, because it is the way that God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church, and inheritors of the Kingdom of God.

Every Sacrament has outward and visible signs which recall for us the inward and spiritual grace of God. In Baptism, that sign is water. In Eucharist, it's bread and wine. In Confirmation, it's the laying on of hands by the Bishop.

I believe in the wild and unbridled use of Baptism. I will baptize the unbaptized in a fish pond, or a creek, a river, or a lake, or the Gulf of Mexico. I'll baptize you in a hospital, a botanical garden, the bed you're born in, or the bed you die in. I'll baptize you with a cup of water, or three handfuls of water, or a sea shell, or a brass font, or a full immersion. I will baptize you anytime, anywhere, under any circumstances—as long as you haven't been baptized before. As we say, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism. One God and Father of All. Does anyone here need to be baptized? I guarantee, I'll stop talking and we will do it right here and now!

Some churches (not the Episcopal Church, thanks be to God) require that you are “re-baptized” in their church. They declare that any other baptism is invalid—as if they had the power or the privilege to do such an outrageous thing!

And some Episcopalians who wander far from the fold, and find themselves in another tradition, may fall prey to the idea that they must be “re-baptized” to show that they're in that new flock.

The fastest-growing mega church in Alabama will baptize you as many times as you like, just so you'll know you are loved by the Lord. They offer another baptism like we do bread and wine.

On the other hand, some Episcopal churches make Holy Baptism a kind of personal privilege. You have to prove to the priest that you are ready for it, or that your family have all been members of Saint Swithin's on-the-Hill since the American Revolution.

Some Episcopal churches make Holy Baptism a difficult business of scheduling. The rector will say, “Your child can only be baptized here four times a year, at the 11 o’clock service, in an English-smocked dress, and barefoot, followed by photographs in the nave from 12:15 to 12:20.”

On the other end of the spectrum, I hear that there is a move afoot to remove any mention of Satan or the power of evil from the liturgy—as if Baptism were some kind of naming ceremony or “christening,” whatever that means.

No, Holy Baptism is meet and right to do, always and everywhere, once and for all, no strings attached. It should never be treated as an inconvenience, or a trial by fire, or waterboarding, or anything other than an act of love and grace by which we are all welcomed into the Household of God. Baptism is how we are sealed and marked as Christ’s very own, and it is a permanent and indelible mark.

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."

It’s an amazing story. Jesus is baptized by his cousin John. Not the other way around. Jesus gives us an example of the rightness of Holy Baptism—and a demonstration that preventing it, or delaying it, or calling it something else, or using it in some demonstration of institutional management, is always, always, wrong.

Baptism makes another important statement. It says that yes, indeed, each person's life is of infinite importance to Almighty God. You should be baptized. Your children and grandchildren should be baptized. Everybody. It reminds me of Brother Love's Traveling Salvation Show, a great old song by Neil Diamond ...

Pack up the babies  
And grab the old ladies  
And everyone goes  
'Cause everyone knows  
It's the Brother Love show

It's a show of love. It's an outward and visible sign of God's grace. It's what we do to welcome people to the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany in Tallassee, Alabama. It's what I do—without partiality, or judgment, or hesitation, or qualification of any kind. I baptize you with water, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **AMEN.**

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