



SERMON RECAP

JANUARY 4, 2026

The Baptism of Jesus

Matthew 3:13-17, 4:12-17

"You are beloved." That's it. That's the sermon. I could go sit down right now, but you're not so lucky. Gallons of ink and far too much blood has been spilled over debating the nature of baptism. Many of our denominations exist because of fights over who should be baptized, what it means, and how much water should be used. One of the greatest black-eyes of the history of Christianity is the history of violence over arguing about baptism.

In the United Methodist Church, we have come to a gracious, Holy Spirit-centered conclusion about baptism. The age of the person does not matter. The amount of water does not matter. There are two things that make a United Methodist baptism valid - an ordained officiant and the use of the Triune God.

The Holy Spirit is present in every baptism, marking the one baptized as "Beloved child of God." I have had people ask me many times over the years if they could get baptized again. They often tell me stories of a difficult life. There is an element of confession as they tell me about some bad choices and rough times.

Every time, I tell them, "When you were baptized you were marked as a beloved child of God. Nothing you did in your life changed that." Through it all, you were beloved. You may not have felt it. You may think you "lost" whatever you were given at baptism, but Jesus is the good shepherd who seeks out the lost. Goodness and mercy has pursued you every day of your life. There is no need to re-baptize anyone because the Holy Spirit doesn't do a do-over. At baptism you were a beloved child of God. That hasn't changed.

It is appropriate, however, to create rituals where people may "remember your baptism." We all need to be reminded of our baptism, even if we don't technically remember it. I was an infant, so I have no memory of my baptism. The child we baptize today will have no lasting memory of this moment.

What I do remember however, was the life my parents led in living up to the promises they made. I remember the church I grew up in. I remember the adults of that church who taught Sunday school, led spaghetti dinners, sang with me in choir, let me read Scripture in worship, gave me advice when I was doing my college search, played softball with me, were glad to see me during college break, and who welcomed me back to preach.

Congregations take a vow after every baptism - and it is even more important at infant baptisms. They promise to **"surround this child with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God."** When we remember our baptism, we remember the vows we took or the promises made on our behalf.

Today the congregation took that vow again for a new child baptized. As we make the promise for this child, we can remember the same promises made for us. The first Sunday of the new year is a great time to remember your baptism.

It is a long tradition to make new year's resolutions. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, knew that the new year was a great chance to renew one's relationship with God. When Jesus began to preach, he said "change your hearts and minds." There is a beautiful and unique moment on this first Sunday of the year to do all of this.

Remember your baptism. Renew your covenant with God. Change your hearts and minds. This is the Kingdom of God.

First - remember that you are beloved. Start from this point knowing that nothing you have ever done has changed that fact. Next, renew your covenant with God. Promises have been made by you and on your behalf. Keep them. Use the fresh start of a new year to start new habits, cut back on the waste, simplify your life.

It has been proven that the new year is a good time to hit a "life reset." Take advantage of that mental edge. Deepen your walk. Study more. Pray more. Serve more. Worship more regularly. Today is a chance to remember, reclaim, and renew for the Kingdom of God is at hand.

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Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but

It is a sign of regeneration or the new birth.

The Baptism of young children is to be retained in the Church.

from the United Methodist Articles of Religion.
Article XVII - Of Baptism

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NEXT WEEK:

New Series: Firm Foundation, the Sermon on the Mount