

Baptized

Menno Mennonite Church
March 23, 2025

Purpose: To remind the congregation of the ongoing relationship of baptism.

Message: Baptism invites us into the work of the kingdom in its wide, ongoing variety.

Scripture: Matthew 3:13- 4:1

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¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee
to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying,

"I need to be baptized by you,
and do you come to me?"

¹⁵ Jesus replied,
"Let it be so now;
it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."
Then John consented.

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized,
he went up out of the water.
At that moment heaven was opened,
and he saw the Spirit of God
descending like a dove and alighting on him.

¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said,
"This is my Son, whom I love;
with him I am well pleased."

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit
into the wilderness
to be tempted by the devil.

When I was baptized in a creek at the bottom leafy ravine in Northeast Ohio, I did not quite know what to expect. Given the nature and meaning of the event I was expecting a certain level of trumpets and import fitting this point of inflection for life and what comes with it. This is coming of age and point of becoming, especially within our Anabaptist tradition. There is an anticipation to the thing. But what I felt most was wet. Happy, to be sure, but wet. Little did I really understand what that initial step might ultimately mean.

Baptism is one of those actions that are big in the church and life-story calendar. Today is March 23 2025 if you want to commit it to memory. There is a whole lot wrapped up in it, no matter the occasion. Entrance into a community, a sign of devotion, an outer sign of inner commitment, the imparting of the Holy Spirit. So much so that we have been given to fighting over the mechanism of what is the right way to do this here. More denominations have sprouted over disagreement over the proper way to conduct baptism than any other point of theology or practice. Some say that without their prescribed method of baptism, the whole thing simply is invalid as if it were some sort of laundry recommendation rather than a participation in the grace of God. When we Mennonites are asked what baptism is, we are most likely to answer that it is the initiation to the church, and that we practice our baptism with adults, and not a whole lot more than that. By our Confession we see baptism described not just as a symbol of water, but also a baptism of Spirit and, for some, of blood as the person remains committed to Christ come what may as a consequence of being aligned with Christ. Funny how we don't put that one too prominently in our discussions of church membership. Baptism is a sign on choosing who it is your will follow and in that choosing being led from there. With all this in play, what should we be thinking about today; what might we expect when the water touches your head.

I am not going over some last minute notes from Catechism despite all appearances. What we celebrate with you today is a special day for you Benjamin, Leah, Zane, and for your families—something in which we all rejoice. But it is also a day where we who have been where you are now are reminded about the choices we have made and the one who we follow too. It is a time to be reminded ourselves of the life of Christ we share. It is starting you well with, perhaps, a little bit of expectation of what might take you on from here.

As I started out, like I said, I did not *feel* a whole lot when I first got baptized. It was easy for me to think about this day as a bit of a graduation of sorts. You are no longer in the kids seats. You can be nominated for seats on committees. You can take communion. You give and

receive counsel to each other. These are big heady ideas and rightly so. It is easy for us to think of today as a passing one stage to the next, from youthfulness into the adult. And it is to be sure. But a graduation not based so much on achievement or your demonstrated accomplishments (though you have each done both admirably) but rather from one phase of following into the next. What we do today is much more a departure that we are blessing you on rather than a celebration of arriving at a given point. Baptism is much more about what happens next as it is what happens today in the midst of words and water.

Think about Jesus' baptism. You had the opening of the clouds, the affirmation of identity, and then immediately Jesus had to go out and think long and hard about what all this meant. Jesus took upon him the identity of Son of God in whom God was well pleased, but then he had to go figure out what to do with all of that and translate it into life and action. As he continued in ministry, Jesus would keep doing this—pulling away, thinking about and praying about the life of calling he was living, and then coming back and living that faith into the world.

The same is true for us. In faith, we are always bringing to bear the question for ourselves: what does it mean for us to live faithfully here and now in the situation we live? No matter the season or the time, that is the question we all ask together. In our baptism, we are committing ourselves to the way of faith, saying yes to the identity of beloved child of God that was there all the time, and meaning to live in that identity. That is a good, important, critical step out of which everything else flows. But just like the point of a marriage is not a wedding but the life of living into the love of the other and identity of *the we* even when it is most hard for us to do, the point of baptism is committing ourselves publicly and personally to the way of living the means of love into our lives.

We celebrate today the acceptance of what is most fundamentally true about us: that we all have sin and we are beloved of God; both at the same time. There is no ritual, no procedure, no incantation that can relieve us from that sin but God's Grace, and nothing but grace that can invite us into the full meaning of accepting that we are beloved. That grace calls us forth to live a new life and a new way as a response to our truest identity: as a child of God, guided by God's spirit, being brought forth in God's love.

Baptism asks us not whether we have arrived, what we understand. Baptism asks us only whether we, each one, are ready to follow, however tentatively, where the God who loves us, leads. That's it. That's all. Baptism inaugurates a new life and new way of being not by virtue of

the act, but by the commitment to live the baptized reality of God in the world that you make here. There will be joys. There will be challenges. There will be times of wondering and doubt. There will be certainty and faith. There will be questions and there will be answers. But we will be met within it by our shared commitment and by God's grace.

That is why it is entirely appropriate that we all start out the same soggy way: to remind us that we are each being born again. Some days, all we feel is wet. Others we are fully alive and well in new life and new living. That is the life of faith. Because what we are about here is a messy, complicated process of coming into Christ. We are elated to have you join in that journey with us. Following Christ, we are birthed into the new life of the Kingdom holds but one promise—no matter what other baptism succeeds this— be it a baptism of fire, spirit, or even of blood-- God will meet us even there, even in that challenge, even in that trouble, even in that contemplation and raise us up again and again, to new life, even life beyond our very imagining.

May you ever hear the call of our Lord and head into the waters of life yet again, celebrating that it there that God meets us and grants us the life of Grace. Hear this, and let it echo within you as best you can from this day forward: Benjamin you are beloved. Zane you are beloved. Leah you are beloved. Sisters and brothers all: you are beloved each one; of this place and of the God who made you. May you live this belovedness and share it as best you may.