

## Reflections for the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord ~ 09 January 2022

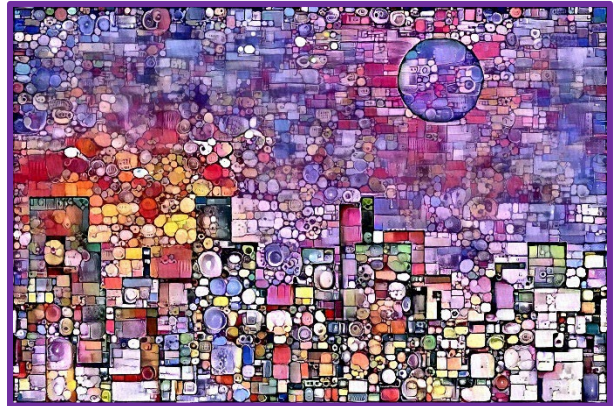
### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

“Here is your God! See, O Lord God, you come with might, and your arm rules for you. . . You will feed your flock like a shepherd; you will gather the lambs in your arms, and carry them in your bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep” (Is 40:9-11). Our first reading from the book of Isaiah sets the stage for the celebration of the Baptism of Jesus.



Listen again to this verse, “Here is your God. . . You come with might and your arm rules for you.” That is the image of God so many have of God, the Almighty One, the All-Powerful One. Yet the verse continues with the surprising description of this Almighty One, “You will feed your flock like a shepherd; you will gather the lambs in your arms, and carry them in your bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.” The shepherd is the lowliest and the poorest of all people in the society. The shepherd carries the lambs but does not take them from the mother who is led gently along with the shepherd. The arm rules for the Mighty God, and the shepherd God holds the lambs in loving arms! The language of “feed,” “gather,” “lambs,” “bosom,” “gently lead,” and “mother sheep” are image of compassion, gentleness, relationship, and inclusion.

Psalms 104 seems to return us to the Almighty One who is “clothed with honour and majesty, who stretches out the heavens like a tent, who set the beams of chambers on the waters, makes the clouds a chariot, rides on the wings of the wind, makes the winds messengers, and fire and flame ministers” (Ps 104:1-4). But once again we are surprised and our understanding is deepened as we hear the last verse, “When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of Earth” (Ps 104:30). The images of sending forth, creating, renewing remind us that our God is life-giving, compassionate, and relational.



The writer of the letter of Titus echoes this same image of a loving and gentle God, “When the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour appeared, God saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to God’s mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit God poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Titus 3:4-6). “Here is your God! See!” – a God who relates to us, who holds us in love and compassion, who carries us and leads us, who gathers us, who sends the spirit, who renews the face of Earth.

When we come to the Gospel story, we see Jesus’ first steps in his ministry, his living out of the life to which God has called him. These first steps are marked by the baptism. Now heaven and Earth, the divine and the human, will be brought together by water, by the Spirit, and by the word. Immediately we are brought back to these same images from the first verses of Genesis and the creation story as God becomes flesh in the cosmos, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep,

while the *ruah* (the wind or the spirit) of God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. . . And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters' (Gen 1:1-3, 6).

Water – essential to life, to energy, to growth, to refreshment, to cleansing – becomes the connection between Earth and heaven from the moment of creation of the cosmos to the moment of Jesus' awareness that he is God's presence among us in a new way. Water marks a crossing



place in the tradition of God's people – the people crossed over the Reed Sea on their way from slavery in Egypt and then again over the Jordan River on their way into the Promised Land. Jesus chooses to be baptized, to cross over into a new way of life, to transformation. Let us not forget that all water is holy, all water is God's gift of creation and of creating. Let us also not forget that we are stewards of water on

Earth. Are we faithful to caring for water so precious and so sacred?

The Spirit also connects heaven and Earth, appearing when the heavens open and hovering over Jesus in the form of a dove (an Earth creature, other-than-human). And, just as God's word brings the cosmos into being, the voice of the creating One speaks once more from heaven, now saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (Lk 3:22). John the Baptist strengthens the sense of transformation by adding that Jesus' baptism will be of the Spirit and water and fire!

You and I share baptism with Jesus. Each one of us has had water poured over us, has been marked by the words, and has experienced the Spirit poured over us. Do we trust that like Jesus, God the creating One has said to us, "You are my Beloved, with you I am well pleased"? [Jan Richardson](#) allows God to speak in this simple, profound verse. We say it today with special memory of Sister Patricia Maher who entered eternal life on this day.

As if we could call you  
anything other than  
beloved  
and blessed  
drenched as we are  
in our love for you  
washed as we are  
by our delight in you  
born anew as we are  
by the grace that flows  
from the heart of the one  
who bore you to us.



It is telling in the Gospel story that Jesus was not baptized only into a personal relationship with his God. Luke says, "When all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was

praying.” Baptism is a sign and a way of inclusion and belonging – in community and with the sacred communion of all creation. Baptism marks our commitment to live in that community, in that sacred communion, every single day.



This feast of the Baptism marks the connection between the season of Christmas and ordinary time. It is in ordinary time that the transforming action of Baptism becomes real. It is in our everyday lives, in our ordinary actions, that baptism becomes real. Baptism is truly a reflection of God's ongoing creation in my life, in your life, in our lives. Our baptism did not occur at one moment in time, but it is lived out every moment in our living. We cannot remember our initial baptism; we do know how we live our baptism every day.

This week, take time to reflect on water in your life – water which you drink, which you use to wash, rain and snow pouring down your window, the river or ocean you gaze on. Take time to reflect on how you use words – to praise, to complain, to condemn, to build up, to create, to soothe. Take time to see the Spirit poured into your very being – the moments when you know for certain that God is present with you, the moments when you see God's goodness reflected in someone you live with or minister among, the moments when you see God's creating presence in trees or flowers or animals or insects. Water, word, Spirit – this is baptism lived every single day. Hear the creating One say to you, to those with whom you journey, to other Earth creatures around you, to Earth herself, “You are my Beloved, with you I am well pleased.”

We have just left the Christmas season when the shepherds and the wise ones were filled with expectation, and their expectations were filled beyond imagining. Now let us continue into 2022 knowing that our expectations will be filled beyond imagining by our God who created and who creates us. The poet, [Scott Ressman](#), echoes this same message:

God of the waters. Water of birth,  
moving us from safety into the world.

God of the waters. Water of connection,  
engaging the playful Spirit, the passionate Christ, the challenging God.

God of the waters. Water of life,  
sustaining, quenching, cleansing.

God of the waters. Water of trouble,  
journeying us from here to there, from the known to the unknown.

God of the waters. Birth us. Connect us.  
Live in us. Trouble us.

Let us live our baptism every day, trusting in the water, the word, and the Spirit!