

# Sermon for Sunday, January 9, 2022 - "A Time of Revelations"

Baptism of Our Lord - First Sunday after Epiphany  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, Iowa  
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

We are in a time of revelations in the church year and as a country.

On the day of Epiphany, January 6, the church celebrates how God is revealed for all the world in Jesus. Right after Epiphany, we celebrate Jesus' baptism and ponder the God who enters the waters with us, the God who claims us as beloved children. All the Sundays following the Epiphany helps us to consider who this God is and how we are called to make God known. This time in the church year is a time of stars and promises, 'aha' moments and miracles, a time of revelation.

Yet for Americans, January 6 now has other associations, other images as we remember January 6, 2021. That was also a day of revelation. Bishop Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, emphasized the revelatory nature of that day in his address to the nation this January 6. I encourage you to watch his whole [twelve minute speech](#). I've linked to it in the printed text of the sermon. Today I want to share excerpts of it with you.

Bishop Curry says, "The nightmare of last January 6th was not just an event. It was a revelation. It was a revelation of deeply dangerous divisions in our nation—some political, some ideological, some racial, and some disguised as religious ... It was also a revelation that there are forces intentionally seeking and working to divide us."

But, he notes, "It was a revelation in another sense. That day, and our response to it, contain potential for both peril and promise. The peril is the possibility of the decline, deconstruction, and even destruction of our nation and its most cherished values. But the promise is the revival and renewal of the United States as the multiracial, multiethnic, pluralistic, democracy that our founders envisioned when they began this experiment. That promise becomes a real and greater possibility if enough of us will summon the spiritual courage necessary to claim it."

Curry continues, "Such a moment demands moral vision that sees beyond mere self-interest and beholds the common good—a spiritual strength stronger than any sword." Bishop Curry then identifies three spiritual keys to living with this moral vision: "First, renew our relationship with God; second, revive our relationship with one another; and third, resurrect our commitment to the ideals we share." As we ponder our scriptures for today as well as the revelation that is the baptism of Jesus, we see God working to provide us with all that we need to do those three things.

Bishop Curry calls us to, "Renew our relationship with the God who the Bible says "is love", with the God who is the Creator of us all." We need to do this, he says, because, "To truly be an instrument of unselfish, sacrificial love—to truly seek justice and not mere revenge—to truly labor for the realization of God's Beloved Community for all of us and not just some of us, here on earth as

it is in heaven, we need the very energies of love from the source of all love to help us become instruments and vessels of that love ... To truly live by love, we need connection to the very energy of love itself."

Today, in our scriptures, we are assured that God is always at work to renew that connection. God calls us, calls you, by name. God says to you, "Do not fear for I am with you." When you pass through the waters, when you face the fires, in all things, God is with you. In words of promise, in the waters of baptism, God speaks to you the same words spoken to Jesus at his baptism, "You are my beloved child." God assures you again and again that you are precious and honored, beloved, adored. The very energies from the source of all love are flowing to you and through you in this moment of peril and promise, always.

Second, Bishop Curry also encourages us to revive our relationship with each other. He says, "The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said, 'If you want peace, you don't talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies.' How we both treat and relate to others is a decision. Martin Buber taught us that we can either relate to each other and the world itself as I-It, or I-Thou. If other people and indeed the created world itself are seen and treated as IT, then they are dealt with as things, as objects to be used and even abused. They exist for our whims. But if the other person and the created world itself are seen and treated as THOU, as holy, as sacred, then they are loved, honored, respected, cherished and cared for. How different would our politics be, how different would our relationships with each other be, how different would our nation be if we would work at getting to know and cultivate relationships with our brother, or sister, or siblings."

Jesus' baptism and the sacrament of baptism are also important for reviving our relationships with one another. I don't think we've always approached baptism as something that can help us to live well with all people. We've often viewed it as a very sectarian ritual that divides us. Should we baptize adults or infants, dunk or sprinkle? Is baptism required for salvation? We've argued about it for centuries.

Yet Jesus' baptism reveals that God sees all of humanity as sacred and holy, worthy of love, honor, and respect. God chooses to come to us in love, as one of us. Rather than remaining at a distance from us, God comes in Jesus to enter into all of what it means to be human, even undergoing a baptism of repentance. Jesus enters into the muddy waters of the Jordan, taking on all our sin. Now nothing can separate us from God. Baptism reveals how powerfully God is with us. And, it empowers us to be present with others in humility and love.

Finally, Bishop Curry remarks, "We must resurrect our commitment to the ideals and values that we share," and notes those that we do still share. Curry then makes the case that, "Unselfish, sacrificial love for each other may well be the supreme value on which democracy depends." He notes that the central words for our nation, *e pluribus unum* - 'from many, one,' are from the writings of the philosopher Cicero. Cicero said, "When each person loves the other as much as himself, it makes one out of many." In other words, "When each person loves the other as much as he loves himself, it makes one out of many possible." Of course, love others as ourselves is also the way of Jesus.

Curry proposes that God's way of unselfish, sacrificial love for each other may be the key to the life of a nation, and the world itself. This is the way of life we are called to in baptism. This is why baptism matters. This is what baptism is all about.

Baptism assures us of our connection to the Source of love.

Baptism calls us to reveal God's love in how we live in the world.

Baptism draws us into a community of love and forgiveness that helps us to follow in Jesus' way of love.

Baptism empowers us to live with a moral vision.

In this time of revelation, it is helpful to return again to what baptism is. So, in this Time after Epiphany we will affirm our baptisms each week. This week we will do a fuller affirmation of baptism that includes renouncing evil, confessing the faith we share, and committing again to the five promises that are core to living in the covenant of baptism. The following weeks, we will affirm these five promises each Sunday. In Jesus' baptism, God reveals such gifts of love that allow us to live with moral courage.

As we affirm our baptisms, we can be a revelation of love for God's world.

Let's take a moment of silent prayer.