

Reaffirmation of Baptism

January 9, 2022

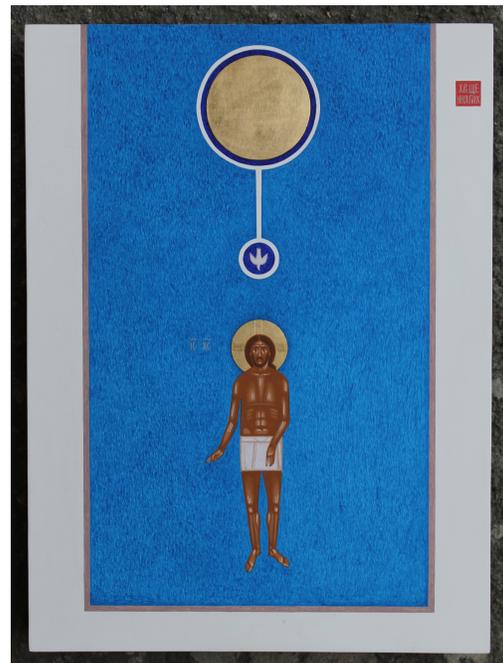
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

North Decatur Presbyterian Church

Rev. David Lewicki, preaching

As you listen to the Gospel today, you will be able to look at this beautiful contemporary icon from the Ukrainian iconographer, *Danylo Movchan*. Note the field of blue that surrounds Christ—the waters... like the water of creation, the waters of birth, the water suspends everything within it.

3:15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah,
3:16 John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
3:17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."
3:21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened,
3:22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."



The water you have next to you is *life*. The water in your cup. The water in the air around you. The water in your body. The water in this font. *Water is life*.

The world we have managed to create somehow alienates us from the source of our life. Ask people where our water comes from and people will say "the tap." But that's not true.

Our water in DeKalb County comes from the Chattahoochee River, the river that flows down from the hills of North Georgia and out to the Gulf of Mexico. Many of you live in the Peachtree Creek section of the Upper Chattahoochee watershed; some of you, if you live further east or south, live in the South River watershed and your water flows east into the Atlantic. Your true home as a creature on this earth is not your city, it's not your county—not defined by some arbitrary line on a map—your true home is your watershed. As the health of your watershed goes, so you go. Water is life.

You remember the “water cycle” from earth science class, back in the misty memory of time? You learned that water never goes away; water is, at all times, all around us, in motion: as vapor and droplets floating in the air; condensing or falling as rain or snow; trickling, rushing downhill via streams and rivers, where it ends up in the ocean or in your basement (kidding). 70% of the earth’s surface is water. It is always being drawn back into the atmosphere by evaporation—but not before trillions of living things drink it to live. Water is in most *every living cell on the planet*. Your body is 2/3 water—every life-giving chemical reaction in your cells is enabled by water.

Water is always moving. It always always flowing, always shifting. Hydrodynamics is one of the most intriguing fields in physics. I mean this in both scientific and theological terms: water is full of mystery.

Water is life.

Our ancestors were closer to water than we are. They had to be. Human beings have had to live close to fresh water to drink, to irrigate our fields. When water is plentiful, we thrive. When water becomes scarce, we suffer. Look at the world and see where civilizations rose, there was living water. The Tigris and Euphrates. The Yangtze. The Nile. Drive across this country and where there are rivers and there you will find fields and also people.

Water is life. In one way, is the most utilitarian of substances. But that’s not all it is. Water is also the source of unspeakable beauty. We don’t just drink water; or bathe in it; or cook with it. It speaks to us. It beckons us. We wonder at it.

This is a place we visited this summer—the confluence of the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers. The river here is massive, humbling. Every one of you has a place where you go to be beside the water. To be near it. Near enough to see the way sun plays on its face. Near enough to watch the wind cutting across its surface giving water its texture. You need to be near enough hear the water murmur, or gurgle, or roar. At a deep level, we understand that living water, among all things in this world, is worthy of worship.

Water is life.

While it’s almost invisible to us, we take it for granted, water is far from invisible in our sacred stories. The Scriptures are drenched. Water is mentioned more than 700 times. As a frame for comparison, prayer is mentioned 600 times.

Water is in the beginning; the primordial stuff from which God creates all of life. Water gently irrigates the garden in Eden. Water is the means by which God eradicates the world of evil in the great flood. Water drowns the Egyptian army as they pursue God’s people on their march to freedom.

Water is a metaphor in the hands of the poets and prophets. Jeremiah says God is “the fountain of living waters,” and he warns us we better not exchange those waters for wells that we try to make ourselves—they always crack go dry. The Psalmist cries out, “My flesh faints for God, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (63). But the prophet Isaiah promises that God will not leave us that way:

“When the poor and needy seek water,
and there is none,
and their tongue is parched with thirst,
I the Lord will answer them,
I the God of Israel will not forsake them.
¹⁸I will open rivers on the bare heights,
and fountains in the midst of the valleys;
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
and the dry land springs of water.

That promise—that God will sustain and surround us with living waters is echoed in the Book of Revelation. When God makes God’s home with us in the City, there will be water there, too. “The river of the water of life, bright as crystal, will flow from the throne of God and the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life.”

Of course there is water in the stories about our friend, Jesus. Jesus calls disciples on the shore of the sea, where they sail and fish. Jesus calms the waves and walks on their rippled surface. Jesus heals a paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda and man who is blind at the pool of Siloam. Jesus meets a woman at a well and they have a conversation about water and more. Jesus says to her, “whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. The water I give will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14). And Jesus’ final instructions upon sending out his disciples for a life of service couldn’t be more simple: give people “a cup of cold water.”

Today we remember our baptisms. I want you to remember your baptism. You were baptized in water. Someone held you, or stood with you; maybe you were plunged into a pool or pond; most likely someone made a cup with their hands, and put it into a bowl, and poured that water on your head. The water in your baptism wasn’t special. It wasn’t shipped in a golden urn from the Jordan. It came from a tap. But anyone who believes that the water of our baptism is “just water” simply isn’t paying attention.

Every drop of water is a hydrological miracle of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation. Water is around you, under you, in the air. It is inside of you catalyzing every action, every thought, every dream. Water cleans and heals your body. Water nourishes. Water restores. And yes, water even forgives your sin and frees you from captivity. Water is a gift. It is freely given and meant to be freely shared.

When you were baptized with water, you were joined into the mysterious hydrodynamics of God. You were baptized into the life that never ends.

Now is the time for you to celebrate. Get your water. Pick it up. Look at it. Put your hand in it.

Let's remember the promises of our baptisms together.

The first promise affirms that's God's mercy is stronger than any power that would otherwise shape our lives. Trusting in the mercy of God, do you renounce evil and turn from the power of sin? If so, say

We will.

The second promise affirms the love that is in Christ is in us. Do you trust in Jesus Christ and will your life be conformed to the life of Christ?

We do and we will.

The third promise is about sharing that cup of water. Will you pour out your own life to nourish the lives of others in this church and in the whole household of God?

We will.

Friends, the justice of God rolls down like water.

The mercy of God is like the dew each morning.

The healing river of God always flows.

Will you put some water on your own head? remember that you are baptized by the water and the Spirit.

Water is life. Let the church say "Amen."