

**A Sermon for the First Sunday after the Epiphany
January 12, 2025**



**Rev. Barbara Bond
New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH**

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[First Sunday after the Epiphany – The Episcopal Church](#)

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

We are Children of God

We Americans find ourselves on a precipice this week. We buried a former President of the United States, and we prepare to inaugurate another one. There is wisdom to be learned from this juxtaposition of death and inauguration – not just for presidents, but for us all.

Our Gospel reading from Luke tells the astounding news that through baptism, we are all beloved children of God. John the Baptist administers baptism to crowds of people at the River Jordan. John takes no credit for himself in this mass ritual. Someone is coming greater than I, he says.

And then Jesus shows up and is baptized, along with all the other people. Suddenly the heavens split open and the Holy Spirit descends like a bird and lands on the newly baptized Jesus. God's voice announces: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Jesus hears this announcement, and it is probably news to him. It is direct: "YOU are my Son." I'm betting everyone else heard it too, and they understood that THEY too were God's sons and daughters. This astonishing announcement begins Jesus' life of ministry. He leaves immediately for the wilderness, to process God's announcement, and to begin his new focus in life.

In the Episcopal church, the theology of baptism shifted in the 1970s, when our new prayer book was being written. Medieval concepts focused on going to heaven. But in our new understanding of baptism, we emphasize life on this earth, not life after death. We look back further in history for baptism's original meaning. In the early Christian church, say the first two or three centuries, baptism was a ritual of initiation, of joining a Christian community. Candidates (all adults) received instruction for two years, and on the eve of Easter, they underwent total immersion in water, and emerged newly born into their new lives as Christians. Liberation is another theme. Christians have interpreted this theme as liberation from sin, and the water as a symbolic cleansing agent. So washing clean is another theme. Baptism is also a time of professing belief, either on behalf of an infant, or for ourselves.

In baptism we undergo a ritual drowning. Ritual is an acting out, enabling us to experience important things by doing them. Ritual is symbolic but also effective. In baptism, we die, symbolically. As we emerge from our dying, we are born to new life. If we listen closely, we can hear the voice of God, telling us, You are my beloved children.

In the Gospel reading today, Jesus also died symbolically, his old life gone, his new life beginning. He was identified as God's beloved, and he was equipped for the beginning of his ministry.

In our Baptismal Covenant, we affirm our belief in the Apostles Creed, and we also affirm a positive way of life that ties us closely to Jesus's teachings. Today, let us reaffirm our Baptismal vows and inaugurate a new year of living our Christian lives intentionally. And listen carefully: God is telling us that we are God's Beloved children.