

The Baptism of Christ: Beloved Before Being Sent

(Matthew 3:13–17 | Isaiah 42:1–9 | Acts 10:34–43)

God reveals who Jesus is not through power and spectacle, but through humility, obedience, and solidarity with humanity.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When Jesus comes to the Jordan, he does something unexpected. He does not arrive as a teacher yet, nor as a miracle worker, nor as someone demanding recognition. He comes quietly. He joins a line of ordinary people. He asks to be baptised.

This alone should already give us pause. If we were writing the story, we might have imagined something more dramatic. A heavenly announcement first. A sign of authority. A clear separation between Jesus and everyone else. But instead, Jesus chooses the place where people are waiting, hoping, repenting, beginning again.

At the beginning of a new year, this scene feels especially fitting. The baptism of Jesus is a beginning, but not a loud one. It is a moment of intention. A step into what lies ahead, taken slowly and deliberately. It reminds us that God often begins new things not with noise, but with attentiveness and trust.

John, understandably, is unsettled. He senses that something is not right in the usual order of things. “I need to be baptised by you,” he says, “and do you come to me?” John expects holiness to move upward, away from the crowd. But Jesus reverses that expectation. He insists on standing where others stand.

Jesus does not deny who he is. But he refuses to claim it in a way that separates him from others. “Let it be so now,” he says, “for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.” Righteousness here is not about moral perfection. It is about faithfulness to God’s way. A way that brings God closer, not further away.

This moment matters deeply. Because before Jesus preaches a single sermon, before he heals the sick, before he challenges injustice or gathers disciples, he chooses solidarity. He enters the waters not above humanity, but with humanity. He aligns himself with those who are vulnerable, searching, uncertain, and in need of grace.

Isaiah gives us language to understand this kind of servant. Not one who shouts or dominates, not one who forces obedience or crushes resistance. “A bruised reed he will not break,” the prophet says, “and a dimly burning wick he will not quench.” This servant is gentle, but not passive. Quiet, but deeply committed to justice. Patient, but unwavering in purpose.

Justice here is not rushed. It is not imposed. It is nurtured. God’s servant brings justice by sustaining what is fragile, by protecting what is close to breaking, by allowing light—even a flickering one—to keep burning.

And then, after Jesus rises from the water, heaven responds. The Spirit descends. And a voice speaks: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

We must listen carefully to when this is said. Not after Jesus has proven himself. Not after success or recognition. Not after suffering or sacrifice. God speaks before all of that. Belovedness comes first. Identity comes before achievement.

This is a word many of us need to hear, especially at the beginning of a new year. We often measure ourselves by what we will do, what we will manage, what we will improve, what we will fix. But God begins elsewhere. God begins by naming us as beloved, before asking anything of us.

This is also important for us as a church community, especially in a time of transition. New seasons—whether personal or communal—invite care and attentiveness. They ask us to listen patiently, to discern wisely, and to serve generously. They remind us that trust is built slowly, and that beginnings do not need to be perfect to be faithful.

Our rhythms here are varied. Some are present every week. Others come when work, health, family, or distance allows. And as you know, I myself come here only once a month. Yet what binds us is not frequency, but belonging. Not constant presence, but shared commitment. Not uniformity, but faithfulness to the same gentle call.

In Acts, Peter comes to a realization that reshapes his faith. “I truly understand,” he says, “that God shows no partiality.” This is not a small insight. It challenges long-held assumptions about who belongs, who is acceptable, who stands within God’s care. Peter learns that wherever people seek righteousness and peace, God is already there.

The Spirit who descended at Jesus’ baptism does not stay contained. That same Spirit moves beyond boundaries—cultural, religious, and social. God’s work is not limited to familiar places or familiar patterns.

The baptism of Jesus reminds us that God meets us where we are, not where we think we should be. And that our calling, as church, is not to stand above the world, but to enter it with humility, patience, and hope. To be present without overpowering. To serve without controlling. To witness without claiming ownership of God’s work.

As we begin this year, and as we continue walking together here in Heidelberg—sometimes briefly, sometimes slowly—may we trust that God is at work in our beginnings. May we learn to listen carefully, to care gently, and to walk faithfully with one another.

And may we remember that before anything else is asked of us, we are already named and held as beloved. Amen.