Year C – Baptism of the Lord

I have in this glass one of the most amazing things that was ever created by God, water. You might question what is so amazing about water. When you take a few minutes to think about it water is a very versatile thing. When you are thirsty you can take a drink and be refreshed. If you are dirty you can take either a bath or a shower and become clean. If you are hungry you can use water to cook food, or even make soup, to satisfy yourself and others. If your car is dirty you would use water to clean it and return it to its natural shine. If you want either your plants, or your trees or your grass to grow you need to use water.

Water also has wonderful uses for recreation. You can take a dip in a pool for either fun or exercise. I have even heard that some people think that exercise is fun. If you enjoy fishing then the water of either a river, or a lake or the ocean could be the ideal place to go. Talking about the water of rivers, lakes and oceans, there are those who love to take their boats out and enjoy a day, or more, on the water. If water gets just a little frozen it becomes, yes here is the S word, snow. Many people enjoy the opportunity to put on either downhill skis, or cross country skis or a snow board and get out into the white stuff. Here in the Northeast, many people also rely on this slightly frozen water for a living. Just as some people enjoy the slightly frozen version of water there are those who enjoy being near the water, at the waters' edge, when the weather is warm, and there is a cool breeze blowing.

Lest we forget, our bodies are mostly water, as is the wonderful planet where we live. Recall the picture taken from a space capsule orbiting the moon of our blue marble of a planet floating in space.

There is also a dark side or water. Recently there were terrible floods both in Missouri and in Great Britain. It has been a couple of years, but there were disastrous tsunamis in both Indonesian and Japan. Each of these incidents resulted in the loss of life. We also hear of the occasional avalanche or mud slide that results in the loss of life.

Yes, water is both wonderful and terrible, and we cannot live without it.

Water is also prominently present in the Bible. The second verse in the whole Bible, in the Book of Genesis, mentions that "a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." A little later in the same book we read the story of Noah and the ark. Imagine forty days and forty nights of rain and the resulting flood that covered the earth; after just a couple of hours of rain and our life can get very difficult. God must really have wanted to send a strong message to the people of that time. Eventually God relents and has the waters recede.

In the Book of Exodus there are several incidents that involve water. One incident is when Moses is trying to get Pharaoh to release the people of Israel from slavery. With prayers to God the waters of the Nile River are turned blood red and made unfit for drinking. Another incident is when Pharaoh has agreed to release the people of Israel and Moses is leading them to the Promised Land. Recall how Pharaoh changes his mind and finds that the people have their backs to the Red Sea. God instructs Moses to raise his staff over the water. The water is parted and the people cross over on dry land, while Pharaoh's army is drowned when the waters flow back.

Most people are familiar with the story of Jonah and the whale in the Bible. What you may not recall was that God wanted to send Jonah to Nineveh. God wanted the people to repent of

their way of life. Jonah knew that God would show mercy to Nineveh if they heard the message. He decides to take a ship and go in the opposite direction. A storm comes and Jonah is thrown over the side to calm the waters lest the ship be sunk. Once in the water, Jonah meets the whale.

Even Jesus uses water to get a message over to the people. The first of his signs in John's Gospel has Jesus at a wedding feast where he turns the stone jars of water used for ceremonial washing into wine. Also in John's Gospel Jesus uses the image of water when he meets the Samaritan woman at the well to lead her to a faith in Him. In another Gospel Jesus is in a boat on the Sea of Galilee when a storm comes up and threatens to sink the boat. Jesus is awoken and he stops the storm and calms the waters.

Yes, water is mentioned very often in scripture.

Today we celebrate Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. You might ask why did Jesus have to be baptized, wasn't he born without sin. Yes that is true and Jesus himself never tells why he submitted to baptism. Several reasons have been suggested over the years. One is that Jesus is actually blessing the water that will later be used for baptism by his followers. Another is that Jesus is showing that he is agreeing with the people that there is a need for repentance for sins in the world. Whatever the reason this marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

It might seem an odd statements but the Baptism that we receive from the Church is more powerful than the baptism Jesus received from John. There are two things that all four Gospels have in common. They each begin Jesus' missionary journey with his baptism in the Jordan

River, and they all recall his passion, death and resurrection. Each gospel writer presents the specific stories from their own perspective, but achieves the same result. Jesus' mission began at his baptism and by his passion, death and resurrection we were freed from our sin. John's baptism was about repentance, but because of Jesus, our baptism was about forgiveness of sin. When we are baptized we are baptized into Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. The same could not be same for baptism administered by John. Does this mean that today's recalling of Jesus' baptism is not important? No.

After Jesus' resurrection he instructed his followers to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of his missionary journey, so our own baptism calls us to that same mission. We share in Jesus' three fold ministry: priest, prophet and king. Last week we recalled the gifts of the magi for Jesus: incense for a priest, burial oils for a prophet, and gold for a king. We may not have received these types of gifts at our baptism, but we are Jesus' priest, prophet and king in a world longing for the faith and peace that only Jesus can bring.

We are baptized with water as a sign of the cleansing of our souls. We now live lives of faith in the one who came to redeem us from our sins, Jesus. Recall the story of the Great Flood of Noah in the Book of Genesis. Jesus is asking us to bring a new flood to the world, a flood in the form of the waters of baptism. Like the Woman at the Well who was seeking eternal water, let the waters of baptism well up in us and strengthen each of us in our own missionary journeys of living out the promises of our own baptisms.