

Matthew 3:13-17 (January 12, 2019)

***Matthew 3:13-17***

13Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. 14John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” 15But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. 16And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

***Historical Context***

Jesus' public activity does not begin until Matthew 4:17. The chapters prior to 4:17 establish Jesus' identity as God's agent whose public activity enacts God's will and reign. Chapters 1 through 3 of Matthew establish Jesus as the son of David and Abraham, Emmanuel, king of the Jews. In his baptism, Jesus, in his first action as an adult, affirms this identity. God bears witness in verbalizing Jesus' identity as God's son (Matthew 3:13-17). In the subsequent scene, the temptation, the devil tests Jesus' commitment but Jesus remains resolute in his identity as God's agent (Matthew 4:1-11).

***Theme: Beloved Child***

In all four gospels, Jesus' baptism precedes the commencement of his public ministry. The theme is clear: the gift of identity precedes mission. We might even say that only by having a clear sense of God's affirmation and identity can Jesus take on the enormous mission in front of him.

And this is where Jesus' baptism intersects our life. For we, too, can only live into the mission that God has set for us to the degree that we hear and believe the good news that we, too, are beloved children of God. That no matter where we go, God will be with us. That no matter what we may do, God is for us and will not abandon us. In baptism we are blessed with the promise of God's Spirit and named a beloved child of God forever.

This matters tremendously because names are powerful. The names we are given or take, the names that arouse pride or shame, names are important. Some we have chosen; others have been given to us. Some lift us up; others tear us down. Whatever the case, names are powerful. But, no matter how powerful our earthly names are, they do not define us. What defines us is the name given to us by God alone: the name of beloved child. This gift of identity and affirmation sends us forth able to face the various challenges and opportunities before us knowing that we are God's own beloved children.