

New Beginnings



Theme: Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of his ministry. Our baptism marks the beginning of our new life in Jesus. 1st Sunday after Epiphany

Object: None is required, but you could use **a calendar**.

Scripture: When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Luke 3:21-22 (NIV)

This is an exciting time. It is the beginning of a brand new calendar year. Some people like to make New Year's resolutions or promises to themselves about what they plan to accomplish in the new year. Here is a list of the top 10 New Year's resolutions people make:

1	Lose Weight
2	Getting Organized
3	Spend Less, Save More
4	Enjoy Life to the Fullest
5	Staying Fit and Healthy
6	Learn Something Exciting
7	Quit Smoking
8	Help Others in Their Dreams
9	Fall in Love
10	Spend More Time with Family

Have you made a New Year's resolution?

Even if you don't make any New Year's resolutions, this is an exciting time. It is a time that **we can forget our past mistakes and look forward to new opportunities that lie ahead of us**. It is a time of new beginnings.

Jesus experienced times of new beginnings in his life too. One of those times was when he was baptized. There were a couple of very important **things that happened when Jesus was baptized**.

- 1) the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove and landed upon him.
- 2) The second thing was that God spoke and said, "You are my Son. I love you and I am well-pleased with you."

This event marked the beginning of Jesus' ministry here on earth. Up until that time, he had not performed any miracles, but **with God's stamp of approval and with the spirit of God upon him, Jesus began to teach and do great things**. From this new beginning, many people began to understand that Jesus was truly the Son of God and they began to follow him.

Our own baptism represents a new beginning for us as well. When we are baptized, God starts us over. Every morning we can make this fresh start through prayer and confessing our sins.

God wants us to live new lives every day.

New beginnings -- God gives us opportunities for new beginnings. Let us make the most of them as we live a new life in Christ through the power of his Holy Spirit.

Dear Father, thank you for new beginnings. Help us to make the most of them -- not through our own strength -- but through the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

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This frame has hung in my study for most of my ministry. Which certificate do you think is the most important one? In chronological order the certificates are: Baptism, Confirmation, Ordination. You might think it's the biggest and fanciest of the 3, Ordination, but it's actually the yellowed certificate of Baptism. I was baptized by Pastor John W. Houser on March 26, 1950. The funny thing about this certificate is that the facts are wrong: I was born on December 24, 1949, not 1950. According to this I was baptized before I was born! What isn't wrong is God's love poured out for me at the font at the old St. Luke's in Dublin, which is now the United Church of Christ. The font, however, is at Christ Lutheran Church in Sante Fe, New Mexico – and that's a long story!

When God says to Jesus after his baptism, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased," he is also saying the same to all who have been baptized. We are God's own, God's beloved, with whom he is well pleased. Isaiah describes how precious we are to God when he cites God's message to the people: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and flame shall not consume you. . . . You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life. Do not fear, for I am with you."

How do we forget the love of God?

That's easy – name one way. Shout it out:

1. Overwhelmed with stuff, concerns, worry;
2. Too many things on the plate;
3. Fear is too great to handle;
4. Low self-esteem; why/how could God ever love me?
5. Hard to believe in God;
6. A just God can't/won't be a loving God;
7. God can't or won't forgive me; I have too much baggage;
8. Never received/accepted God's love in the first place.

There are lots of things that get in the way and cause us to forget the love of God.

A mother and her young daughter were driving to the zoo. On their way, the little girl began counting out loud the number of crosses she saw on various church steeples.

"Mom," she asked, interrupting her counting, "how many times did Jesus die?"

"One time, dear," her mother answered.

"Then why are there so many crosses?" the little girl asked.

"To help us remember how much Jesus loved us," her mother replied, "He died on a cross for us."

"Well," the child responded, "how could we forget something like THAT?" (Malinda Fillingim, THE UPPER

How COULD we forget something like that? And yet we do, for various reasons.

My ministry among you has always been to remind you of God's love for us. We have this confidence in God's love because of our baptisms. We have been "branded for life" marked with the sign of the cross indelibly, forever. God's promises of love and forgiveness and heaven are for us, for you and me. Maybe a good New Year's resolution would be to remember that. Wear a cross in some fashion that reminds you of this every day. Every day is a new day with God, filled with new possibilities.

Some of us require medication to keep the cobwebs at bay and to illuminate the darkness that we feel, especially in the winter time. That's okay – I've taken a maintenance dose of mine for years. The stuff that gets in the way of experiencing the love of God (and consequently the love of others as well) needs to be pushed aside and swept away. It impedes the love of God, quenches the closeness of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Don't be afraid to admit you're not feeling well or as you would like to feel. Lay it in God's hands – and maybe your God-given doctor's and therapist's hands. Every day is a new day in the love of God.

Remember this: "Do not be afraid; I am with you. I have called you each by name. Come and follow me, I will bring you home. I love you and you are mine."

The Rev. Robert E. Mitman