

Baptism of Our Lord 2017
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St. Matthew's Kellers Church
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you, from our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

When I was in college, I took a study trip to Greece. The course was classical art and architecture. We saw a lot of ruins. I loved it. It wasn't exactly an immersion trip, since the students and our professor all spoke English to each other. I had taken Greek for 2 years, so I could recognize the letters on all the signs. But since I had taken classical Greek and not modern Greek, I really couldn't read anything. And I didn't realize how much I longed for reading my own language until one day a man sitting next to me took out a Newsweek magazine. I almost swooned to see those letters! As and Bs and Es and Ts! Not alphas and betas and epsilons and taus. It was like being back home. I hadn't realized how much I missed my own culture, my own language. The familiar look of the letters. The ease with which I can read.

In today's gospel, John baptizes Jesus in the river Jordan. It was probably a baptism of immersion. With Jesus going all the way under the water. I kind of doubt it was a sprinkling or little pouring, like I will do to little Elliana today. Jesus went all the way under – and came back up. Like a little death and resurrection. In that kind of baptism, the one baptized can feel the power of the water and sense the danger. And the relief when coming up, breathing the air. Breathing life. A new life.

At Jesus' baptism, the Spirit of God descended on him. God's spirit, or breath, or wind. God's life. God's voice. God's power came on him, at this beginning point of his ministry. It settled on him, like being surrounded by the gentlest of tornadoes – God's wind, God's spirit or breath, always there for Jesus, in every breath, in every sigh. For Jesus it may have been like being back home. Immersed in the water of the Jordan – and then surrounded by the familiar voice of God: This is my Son the Beloved; with whom I am well pleased. With the Spirit, the wind, the breath of God, coming down right on him.

Winds go where they will. Rivers that overflow go where they will, too. When we are immersed, in a river or a culture, we tend to go with the flow. My husband has a saying about a river's flow: "Even a dead fish can swim downstream." But those of us who are baptized by God's Spirit ought to be able to swim upstream. We should be blown more strongly by the breath of God than the winds of the world. Even if we have just been sprinkled, we have gone deep into the waters of baptism – and God's voice, God's word,

has been pronounced over us: This is my Child, my Beloved; I have called you by name – you are mine. Those of us who have been baptized were baptized with water and God's word. And God's Spirit was called down on us. Not so we would always just go with the flow of our culture or our crowd. God's Spirit was called down on us to remind us that we are God's. That God's voice is the voice we are to listen to.

God's voice, God's powerful voice, that proclaimed at Jesus' baptism, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased," God's voice speaks love to all God's people. All God's suffering people. All God's sinful people. There is suffering in the world and we who are baptized in Christ are not immune to it. How can we expect to be immune from suffering? Our Lord was not immune to it! After Jesus was baptized by John and God's Spirit, he went into the wilderness, where he fasted for 40 days, and then was tempted. Do we really think we will be able to get through this life without any suffering, just because we are baptized? We will not. We will find ourselves immersed in suffering, as Jesus was. Some suffering is beyond our understanding. But God's word, God's voice, God's spirit and power, is Love. Love that swims upstream, not matter how strong the current of our human culture is that we are swimming against.

What it comes down to is this: we are God's. Baptism, even baptism by sprinkling, is immersion into God's culture. After baptism, we have a new home. No matter what culture or country we find ourselves living in, we are at home in God. God's Holy Spirit blows on us, breathes in and over us. God's Spirit speaks God's word and blesses us with life. Let it be so! Amen!