



ST. LUKE'S  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

## Sermon for the Baptism of Jesus, January 2021

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

**Genesis 1:1-5**

**Mark 1:4-11**

Fr. David Gortner

Friends, fellow children of God, welcome to 2021.

We turned with hope and relief from the last year to this new year, seeking to renew our strength.

And then, we are confronted with the terrible events of this last week, in our nation's capital. We are dismayed, deeply disturbed, stirred to anger and disgust, touched by despair. Seditious insurrection with violent intent. Promise of further violence.

Suddenly, we are in the chaos. Suddenly, we are in the throes of sin, gleefully pursued and embraced.

Let there be light!

This is our cry, our pleading. God, let there be light. Lighten our darkness, we beseech you, O Lord, and by your mercy defend us from the dangers and perils of this night.

Let there be light! This is God's declaration, God's first words at the dawn of creation, when the world was chaotic, formless, empty, and immersed in deep darkness.

God speaks, and something new comes into being. "Let there be light." It's a declaration. And, it's an invitation. "Come on, light – come and be!" And there was light. And God saw that the light was good.

Today, we start our journey with Jesus in his adult life and ministry. Emmanuel, God-with-us, is on the road. And it begins with his baptism. Today, remembering Jesus' baptism, we also baptize a young baby boy, Boyd Allan. Boyd joins us in God's gift of new life and light. Today, with Boyd and his parents, following Jesus, we renew our baptismal promises.

Baptism – Let there be light!

In many ways, that is what confession of sin is – it is our cry to God, "Let there be light. Let light come and dawn in me. I am in darkness, darkness is all around, I am lost in the chaos, I have lost my way in following down paths that have promised light but have given only more darkness. My mind is clouded, my heart is lured away, what I am doing now or thinking now or wanting or wishing now is no longer in the light. Oh, God, let there be light!"

The people came to the river – many people came, to go down into the river with John the Baptist and be buried in the water, to be raised up and to look into the sky. Let there be light. A new creation comes to life and grows.

Meanwhile, in other places, people were going about their lives in marketplace, roadways, homes, farms. Herod in his protected palace was scheming and conniving. Fishermen and shepherds and farmers were netting, herding, planting, weeding, harvesting – and complaining about the state of

things under Roman rule. The Emperor and Senate were making decisions, a long way away. Soldiers were pressing order, insurrectionists were plotting their bloody rebellions.

But down at the river, people were hearing a call to a different life, a new life. People were awaking to their own wayward and distorted ways of living and being. People were bringing the deep cry of every person's heart to the surface. "Let there be light! I will descend into the water, I will give myself in trust to the water and to another's hands. I will be flooded clean. I will be lifted up. God will cleanse me through and through. I will see and be in a new way. Oh, God, let there be light!"

The people walked down into this river, not to cross over to the other side as they had over a thirteen centuries before. They were not leaving their life behind to go to a new place. The journey was not to find grass greener somewhere else.

The people rose up out of the river, one by one, and returned to the ground they came from. The land was the same. The world around them was still the same. But the life they were living was changed. They had left behind in those waters the corruption and distortion and chaos and evil and twists and wrongs that they had ever embraced or been lured into. They accepted, fully received, and embraced God's declaration – "you are forgiven, you are cleansed, you are freed" – and took up God's invitation – "see with new eyes, hear with new ears, perceive and desire and breathe and live and move and step forward and act with a fresh, clean, new heart and mind."

Jesus came to the river and was baptized. This is a bit of a mystery – "the sinless one to Jordan came," as we sang in the hymn. What did Jesus need baptism for? But Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, walks among us and with us into all places. Jesus submits to the same waters that take us, and is buried in its depths, peering into the surrounding darkness. Jesus gives himself to another's hands in trust. Jesus is raised up, opening eyes to see the sky.

And the heavens tear open. Just as he rises up from the water – just now! Get used to the suddenness, that's how the Gospel of Mark rolls – things are happening suddenly and immediately, all the time. The heavens tear open just as he is lifted and rises up. The Spirit flies and flows, like over the deep at creation. Jesus hears fully God's declaration – "You are my Son, the Beloved. With you I am well pleased." Let there be light! You are light. God's declaration to Jesus is also God's invitation. "I delight in you. Be who you are, my beloved. Be fully who you are."

Jesus stepped back onto the same ground from where he came. Mark's Gospel continues, "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness." Coming to the light and being embraced and named by God brings us even more face to face with temptations and lures. Wild things and demons can lure us off course. It is clear, from this week, that many who claim the name of Jesus have been lured off course into the seduction of embracing violence and bloodlust. Many who claim the name of Jesus – and many who don't and who don't care – have been seduced into temptations of power and force against others, which requires first the mental sin of dehumanizing others and twisting their image into something demonic to hate.

Jesus wrestled with and faced the wild things and the temptations of Satan and his minions. That was his first work in the new life of light dawning through him in the world.

Oh, how tempting it would have been to seize this moment and take power. God has spoken! What other charge does he need? He can just take the power and obliterate all things that would stand in the way. He can step up in grand-standing fashion and put on a show of power. He can solve every problem with his policies and powers.

But Jesus keeps these temptations in the wilderness, in the wilds, and leaves them in the untamed chaos. And then, he steps into his ministry and mission just as John was arrested by Herod.

Let there be light.

And the Light comes. And the darkness does not comprehend it. And the darkness cannot overcome it.

Friends, these are dark times. Incredibly dark times. Threats of civil war rumble, now no longer under the surface but bubbling up at the surface, as people embrace the seduction of sedition and insurrection. Violent intentions are fueled by dehumanizing statements and beliefs about other people, and are inflamed and justified by twisted truths and lies about one another that are taken as truth. This is the world of chaos and strife, the world where cruelty gets its lifeblood and takes life of others.

Come into the light. Come into the light. Let there be light – and let it begin in us.

There is a representative, Andy Kim, who returned to the Capitol building after things had calmed down, saw the disruption and chaos left behind, and began cleaning up. He got down on his hands and knees in the rotunda and began to clear the debris.

This is part of what we do. I don't know if Rep. Kim is a follower of Jesus or not. But this is what we do as followers of Jesus, as we open ourselves to letting the light shine through. We clean up. We care for others. We speak with eyes on light and love.

Come into the light. Come into the light. Let there be light – and let it begin in us.

Remember your baptism. Remember, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever.

Follow Christ again into the waters. Give yourself to the flooding, washing waters with Jesus. Go down into the depths with Jesus. And rise into the light. God is tearing open the heavens, and is declaring what you are and inviting you to all you were made to be. Follow Jesus on his way, that Way of Love and Light that surpasses all understanding. Do not be seduced by the wild things and the tempting demons that twist the truth and lure to power and grandiosity. Follow Jesus, and let your light shine with clarity, conviction, and deepest care. And call others to the light. Let Christ be our all in all, with boldness and humble devotion.

And God saw that the light was good. Let the new creation grow.

Amen.