

**“New Beginnings”**  
Message by DD Adams  
Communion Sunday / Baptism of the Lord Sunday  
January 7, 2018

The Old Testament lesson is Genesis 1, verses 1 through 5. When God began to create the heavens and the earth—the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God’s wind swept over the waters—God said, “Let there be light.” And so light appeared. God saw how good the light was. God separated the light from the darkness. God named the light Day and the darkness Night. There was evening and there was morning: the first day.

The gospel lesson is from Mark, chapter 4, verses 1 through 11. John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins.

John wore clothes made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. He announced, “One stronger than I am is coming after me. I’m not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw

heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. And there was a voice from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.” This is God’s word for God’s people.

Please pray with me. God of new beginnings, who sent his only Son to be with us always, who is Emmanuel, God with us, we pray your blessing on the reading, hearing, and understanding of your word. Be with us God as you let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Peace be with you! I pray you all had a blessed Christmas and that this New Year will bring your family and this Church many blessings from the Lord! Blessings from the Lord, who would *ever* turn away from them? Who would *ever* disregard the presence of Emmanuel “God with us”? Who would *ever* walk in darkness knowing that the presence of Christ can be ever-present with you!

The Wise Men didn’t turn away when a sign in the heavens proclaimed something great was happening. A magnificent star appeared and moved, and wise men had heard about a great king who would be born. They went looking for that Epiphany and the manifestation of this great king, but Scripture reminds us, new beginnings can many times be rough and bumpy!

Even Genesis 1:2 tells us that pre-creation needed some help in the beginning. It was shapeless and without form, it was dark, empty and chaotic. Then

God's wind swept over the water. Maybe it was the breath or the Spirit of God, but it was a robust and strong wind. God was planning on making some changes.

So John the Baptist came along. He was a different sort of man, not always pleasant to be around, he smelled funny, he ate weird food, and he didn't care about the clothes he wore or where he lived. He had one thing in mind—getting people's attention about God. He screamed a lot about changing your heart and life. Yet, despite the screaming, people were still coming to see him.

John the Baptist talked a lot about receiving the forgiveness of sin. He said we needed to get that rotten stuff out of our lives, stuff that poisons us and makes our relationship weak with God. That's what Baptism initiates; it starts us on a journey where God promises to always be with us.

Now we know that Jesus never sinned or needed forgiveness of sin. So why was Jesus baptized? He was baptized to demonstrate that the righteousness he would fulfill was what every sinful man, woman or child needed in order to identify with him.

In Matthew 3:15, Jesus said it was fitting *for us* to fulfill all righteousness; it was the right thing to do. It was a way to confirm the authority of both John and Jesus. And it was then confirmed by the Father when the voice from heaven spoke as Jesus came up out of the water. Jesus was fully God and fully man, but with us, now that's an entirely different story.

When we're baptized we identify ourselves with someone powerful and good. It's a way of showing our readiness to obey God as we do what we can to spread the good news. We need that presence and power of God to walk beside us every moment, guiding and directing our steps; this is how we change our heart and life!

Baptism, it's a new beginning and start, but it's not always rosy and many times the way is bumpy. Genesis shows us that. God had to reshape, give a purpose to, and bring light into the world. Creation needed some refining! Looking at the front cover of the bulletin, and reading Mark 1:10, literally, the sky split open and the heavens were ripped apart when Jesus came up out of the Jordan.

Our lives will often be stormy. They'll be floods and fires as Psalm 29 says but when we agree with God about our sin and our need to walk with him, we'll come up out of that water *knowing* and *believing* that Emmanuel, God with us, *will* empower us to change our heart and life. This is our calling. This is our purpose as we come together to worship God and become a messenger of the good news.

Please pray with me. God who brings us purpose and is a constant presence, who else but you will be our source of all that's good and right and true? Who else will guide our children and teach them all things? Who else will care for those who are indifferent and resistant to the God of all creation? Only you God can shape and change our heart and life.

Only God brings water that cleanses and waters the earth and washes away our sin. God you are that mighty wind and breath that sets us on the path to rightness. You are the very life of all Creation. Bless your people with strength and peace. Create in us new hearts and lives filled with a fountain of life that continually pours forth all that you are in us and through us. Amen.