

Grace and peace to you from God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen

(Did anyone notice that I said Holy Ghost instead of Holy Spirit? Hold on to that thought...)

Isn't it nice to have the potholes in our parking lot filled in? I am very grateful to Doug for generating the "adopt a pothole" campaign. The staff and council were so afraid that someone would accidentally step into one of the holes and twist an ankle or worse yet, fall. The potholes had gotten deep enough, that when we had one of those infamous afternoon thundershowers the potholes filled with water and created wonderful mud puddles. I saw one preschooler following his mother across the parking lot, delightedly stomping in as many potholes, aka puddles, as he could!

There is something magnetic about puddles and children. One afternoon after a hardy rainstorm filled all the potholes in the streets and alleys, a young mother watched her two little boys playing in a puddle through her kitchen window. The older of the two, a five year old lad, grabbed his sibling by the back of his head and shoved his face into the water hole. As the boy recovered and stood laughing and dripping, the mother ran to them, "Why on earth did you do that to your little brother?!" she blurted out.

"We were just playing 'church' mommy" he said. "I was baptizing him in the name of the Father, the Son and **“in the hole-he-goes.”**

Today we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. John the Baptist didn't dunk Jesus in a pothole; he “dunked” him in the River Jordan. I have always been so touched by this act. Jesus came to us as an ordinary baby, with a common name, from a common town. He didn't have to be baptized, but he chose to be baptized. Jesus waded into the River Jordan and placed himself on our level. Even more moving is God's claim and blessing on his son.

John the Baptist was the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Jesus' mother, Mary, and Elizabeth were cousins. This makes Jesus and John the Baptist second cousins.

When Elizabeth was 6 months pregnant, Mary went to visit her. At Mary's greeting, Elizabeth felt John move in her womb. He leaped for joy at the sound of Mary's voice. Even though he was still in the womb, John was already in action as the prophet who would help prepare the way of the Lord.

John the Baptist grew up to be a unique character. He preached and probably lived in the wilderness of Judea. His clothing was made of camel's hair and he ate locusts and wild honey. The locusts could have been crunchy, nutritious little bugs or a nut, the carob that poor people often ate. The honey could have come from wild bees or it could have been a kind of sap from trees. It really doesn't matter. The point is that John ate the diet of the very poor.

John lived in the wilderness partly out of choice and partly because he was no longer welcome in Jerusalem. He was a Levite and his father served in the temple, as was customary for the Tribe of Levi. This was a respectable position for a Jewish young man, but John was different. God had chosen him to help prepare the world for the birth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. As glorious as this may sound, his family and friends were not impressed. In their eyes, Jesus was John's second cousin. Nothing more. Nothing less.

At Jesus' request, John baptized Jesus in the river Jordan, and what a significant moment it was. As Jesus came out of the water, the Holy Spirit – in the form of a dove - landed on his head and God's voice boomed from the heavens, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." God declared to his son, for the entire world to hear, "I claim you, I love you, I am proud of you." Jesus' baptism is often referred to as the inauguration of his public ministry. God gave him blessed him with identity, security and confidence.

We are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Not only are we forgiven and made acceptable in God's sight, we too are anointed for service and receive the sustaining blessings of identity, security and confidence. Martin Luther leaned heavily on his baptism. When he found himself ready to give up, whenever worry for his life and the life of the Church overwhelmed him, he would touch his forehead and say to himself: 'Remember Martin, you have been baptized.'"

So my friends, as a baptized child of God, anointed for service, what does your Call look like? Does it look like that of Mary...pregnant, carrying life altering news? Or Joseph...getting more than you bargained for in life? Or John the Baptist...always feeling like you're out of step with the rest of the world? Or his mom, Elizabeth...hanging on for the ride? I don't know about you, but the thought of being called to lives such as these is frightening!

That is, until I remember that through our baptism, our relationship with God and each other is summed up in God's declaration to us: "I claim you, I love you, I am proud of you." We are called by God to be nothing more than who he created us to be. All he wants in return is our love and for us to share that love with as many people as we can.

There is no "have to" here. We "GET to" take the gift of Christmas and share it with as many people as possible. I can't think of anything I would rather do.

Throughout the season of Epiphany, let's step it up a little. Let's "Go tell it on the mountain." Come walk the neighborhood with me on Tuesday, January 17! Let's let our light shine and chase away the darkness in our lives the lives of those around us. Let's remind ourselves that we are equipped for ministry. I want you to close your eyes, make the sign of the cross on your forehead, and say to yourself, "Remember _____ (fill in your name) you have been baptized." Ready . . . "Remember, Connie, you have been baptized." Amen