

**January 12, 2020 – Acknowledged and Affirmed**

**Given by Rev. Mattei**

There is an immediate rush of joy and ecstasy at the announcement of a pregnancy. What follows between the time of conception and the actual birth is a period of anxiety that all go well for mother and baby, and a fun time spent in search of a suitable name. Mary and Joseph didn’t agonize over what to call their baby: an angel told Joseph to name him Jesus.

In today’s gospel reading, we get a naming story of a different kind. This is the story of Jesus’ baptism, and we have one main character and a supporting character in the story who are considering their identity and role. Jesus comes to John for baptism. There is, first of all, a back and forth display of humility, respect, and deference between Jesus and John the Baptist. The two acknowledge and affirm each other’s authority and dignity within God’s salvific plan: to Jesus what counts most is “to fulfill all righteousness” and to be in covenant with the Father. Secondly, this life orientation is well acknowledged and affirmed by the divine voice that declares Jesus the Father’s beloved Son. In a way, this is God’s name for Jesus...and for each of us in our baptisms. In our baptism, in fact, we are acknowledged and affirmed by the Father, in Jesus, through the Holy Spirit. We are named “Beloved Children of God,” a name that gives us dignity and direction in life. Our name shapes who we will become. By being true to our name, we become righteous before God.

But how do we learn to be true to our name of Beloved Child? If we do not consider baptism as a static, one-day event but as an ongoing calling into which we grow, we may learn to live into the identity of already being God's beloved.

The fact is, God is “our” Father not individually but as a family. We are God’s beloved children and therefore we grow into our identity as a community of siblings. We share a bloodline, Jesus’. This community, aka the Church, has Jesus as its head and functions as Jesus’ body. What Jesus wants to do in the world today, he does it through the Church. What role are we playing within that body?

The God who calls us his beloved children is ready to give us all the spiritual blessings ([Eph. 1:3](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A3&version=NrsV)), including wisdom and revelation to know him better (v. 17). All that God wants is for us to get to know God and God’s power that is in us, the same power that brought Jesus back from the dead (v. 20). Because it is easy for us to give in, admire and adopt the ways of the world ([Eph. 2:1-3](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+2%3A1-3&version=NrsV)), God has intervened and, by grace, has rescued us from our foolishness and brought us to God’s presence in Christ (v. 7). Now, God wants to use us as vessels of God’s grace to the whole world. Grace is granted to us to become aware of God’s presence in our lives and in the world. God has fashioned us for good works (v. 10) that benefit the whole of creation. It is incumbent on us to receive God’s grace with responsibility and honor: much training in prayer and meditation is needed to get in touch with our true identity and shape our lives according to God’s will.

In Jesus, we are called to live a new way of life, a way that brings joy, restoration, and relief to our neighbors. May we learn to appreciate the dignity of our call. Amen.