



## **“The Light That Is You”**

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris

*Luke 3:15-17, 21-22*

*As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”*

*Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”*

Our annual renewal of baptismal vows is a beautiful service. It gives us all the opportunity to pause again at the beginning of this New Year and focus on who we are—who we really are—who we hope to become--in the sight of God and as members of this community, the church. And it gives us a chance to remember that in our baptism, God calls us, each and every one--names us, claims us, gifts us, and empowers us to be the person God is creating us to be as a beloved child of God.

The wonderful American composer, playwright, singer, actor Lin-Manuel Miranda said this, which can serve as a great introduction to our annual service of Renewal of our Baptism: Hear this invitation. He said: “G’morning. Bring every bit of yourself into the room. What you’ve got from the family you’re from, what you’ve got from the families you’ve chosen. Your willingness to listen, your longing to be heard, your courage, your vulnerability, the best of you, all of you.”

Think first of those words for a moment in terms of Jesus’ life. We’ve fast-forwarded. No longer a newborn, he is now a young adult being baptized by John in the River Jordan. Scripture tells us: “...when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, and the heaven was opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon him...and a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’” Here is Jesus, poised to embrace the fullness of his identity and his calling.

Now hear Miranda’s opening words in terms of your own life: “Bring every bit of yourself into the room. What you’ve got from the family you’re from, what you’ve got from the families you’ve chosen. Your willingness to listen, your longing to be heard, your courage, your vulnerability, the best of you, all of you.” In baptism, God claims us as God’s own—each of us--precious, beloved, entrusted, and upheld by God. In our baptism, God trusts us with the name “child of God” so that, knowing ourselves to be special and loved, we can share that love with all whom we meet.

The contemporary theologian Rachel Held Evans has written: “The great struggle of the Christian life is to take God’s name for us, to believe that we are beloved and to believe that is enough.” My prayer this morning is that each of us, as we pray, as we come forward, as we feel the water on our forehead, that each of us might sense the heaven opening and hear within our hearts the voice of God saying: “You are my child, my beloved. With you I am well pleased.” And you will find the light that is you.

Today, with the church in every place and of every age, as beloved children of God, we ponder our place in that great stream of saints, past, present, future, somehow promising that we will live in the love and power of something much greater than ourselves, the Holy God who, in baptism, hallows every life with grace and courage and hope.

Baptism is about who God is and who we are in the sight of our God and who God wishes us to be in this world. About who God wishes us to be for this world. About the kind of person God creates us to be, a person who embodies, in our own way, in our own life, in our own family, in our own work, in our own circle of friends—a child of God who embodies the marks of the Kingdom. Compassion. Justice. Generosity. Caring. As we move towards baptismal renewal this morning, our ushers will first come forward to receive our tithes and offerings. As the offering is received, I’d also like you to take out the index card in your OOW this morning and write on it clearly the name with which you were baptized, your Christian name, first and middle. Bring your card forward when you come in a few moments to renew your baptismal vows. The pastors will read from these, collect them in these baskets, and then place them all on the altar table this morning, as a symbol of the

rededication of our lives to God this day. We will also give you the gift of a small shell to remind you of your baptism. Keep it in your pocket or your purse—somewhere it will remind you of the gift and promise of this day. If you have not been baptized and would like to be baptized this morning, please just let us know as you come. This is also the perfect day to install our new officers and church leaders for 2019. These are folks who have agreed to step up and give of their time and talent and gifts and passion and hopes and dreams to help guide and direct our mission and ministry. Know them, pray for them throughout the year. They're a great group of faithful, sincere, dedicated fellow Christians. We are fortunate to celebrate and support their leadership among us today.

And if you have come to worship this day with some longing in your heart for a new and improved life in this New Year, even perhaps some new ways yourself to serve and give back, to find the light that is you, find it here in the waters of baptism. For just as in the very beginning of all things, God's Spirit continues to hover over us, even our chaos and ambiguity. God is present here this morning, to bring forth life, to restore us each and all to wholeness and peace and hope.

In the beautiful poem written by W.S. Merwin entitled "To the New Year" we hear these words:

"so this is the sound of you  
here and now whether or not  
anyone hears if this is  
where we have come with our age  
our knowledge such as it is  
and our hopes such as they are  
invisible before us  
untouched and still possible"

May the beauty and power of this day renew your life and ground you in the truth of your baptism and the light that is you.

Notes:

W.S. Merwin "To the New Year."

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