

EPIPHANY 1C 2025
Immanuel Highlands Episcopal Church
Wilmington, Delaware
January 12, 2025

Today is the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord. We find ourselves standing at water's edge, with all we think we know and believe about Jesus of Nazareth, and wonder why he would need to be baptized by John.

John wonders the same thing in some versions of this story, so we're in fairly good company here. Although John will later ask if Jesus is the one they've been hoping for, at the Jordan he thinks the roles are reversed. Luke doesn't give us those details. We just hear that Jesus was baptized, and God's announcement.

But that announcement is not just about Jesus. Let's go back to Isaiah's words. These are from the second prophet named Isaiah, to a people gathered in exile who are soon to be released and told to go back to their homeland. Their homes and way of life, including Temple worship, are no more. They still live in a foreign land, which just happens to be in the same region that we're taught is the site of our earliest civilizations. It's the land of ancient Mesopotamia, near the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. I'll let your minds wander back to elementary history to ponder that.

There is, I think, a typographical error in our translation of the first verse in today's first lesson. The translators of the New Revised Standard Version carried on the tradition begun with the King James Version, the first "authorized" English translation of scripture. By "authorized," I mean that those who worked on it weren't threatened with beheading or burning at the stake for their work to make scripture available to anyone who could read the same language they spoke. The king, James I, gave permission for the work to be done. Another story, another time.

Look at that verse from Isaiah. Where it says "I have called you by name, you are mine" I want you to imagine the word "mine" with a capital "M." It's not so much possessive as it is a proper name. A noun. The prophet reminds those lost in exile who they are to God. On this day when we celebrate the baptism of Jesus, it's who he is. And, as we will remind ourselves in a few minutes, it's who we are.

Think about that. Remember those times when you seemed to be lost in the confusion of life's changes. A manager tells you that you will be moving to a new location within the month. They need you there so the business can continue its work. A doctor gives you a diagnosis. No, it can't be true, even if it turns out to be good news. I've been told that my mother argued with the doctor for several minutes when she learned my younger brother was on the way. What she might have hoped was just a virus is now a senior citizen. My earliest memories are of them looking at the house I grew up in to make room for his arrival, and then bringing him home from the hospital a few days after his birth.

Today, I want you to consider what the name “Mine” means in the life of this parish. We are baptized into this community of the faithful, raised as disciples in the life and teaching and manner of life of Jesus of Nazareth. But when life throws a curve our way, what does the name “Mine” mean to us?

I’ve told you my story of being a social worker and walking through the darkness to a subsidized apartment to help a single mother as she worked to raise her two young sons. Many street lights were out in this area deemed unimportant by local leaders. Voices in the darkness made me fearful for my own safety. But then a voice said “because Jesus lives, you can do this.”

You are Mine. Capital M. Because of that, it doesn’t matter, in the long run, what others try to do. The apostle Paul faced that same decision when he kept telling others that Jesus lives even after Paul had been ordered to stop doing that, because it conflicted with Roman teaching that the emperor was a god. But Paul continued, and it eventually cost him his life when, exercising his right as a Roman citizen, he appealed his sentence to the emperor Nero.

You are Mine. You are baptized into the life and death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Yes, it may cause some conflict, some trouble now because there are any number of other gods competing for our worship. But in the long run, in the big picture, what does it mean? Our life as a parish will depend on how we answer that question. God has an eternity for us to answer it. We might not want to take that long. But as we consider our answers, let’s take some time together to talk about them. There’s a large community beyond these walls who might be wanting to hear what we say.

The name “Mine,” given to us in the name of our Creator at baptism, means that so much that might occupy our time and thoughts may not be as significant as we want. It also means that the difficult events and times may diminish in their perspective. “You are Mine” means that our life together isn’t so much about repeating past memories, no matter how pleasing they are. “You are Mine” is our identity meant to be lived in our lives going forward, not just in remembrances of things past. After all, the meaning of “Mine” back then may not be the same as it is today, and today’s definition may not fit tomorrow.

That is, until the time when tomorrow becomes the now that lasts forever. Then, the name Mine will be our welcome home. May God be as well pleased then as on that day beside the Jordan River.