

“Baptism of the Lord: Reaffirming our Baptisms”

Scripture: Isaiah 43:1-7; Matthew 3:13-17

Rev. Mary Henderson Bowman

January 12, 2025



First Presbyterian
Church of Charlotte

This morning we get to experience both of the sacraments that the Church celebrates.
We will celebrate communion and we will reaffirm our baptisms.

Sacraments are a remarkable feast for the senses. This morning, all of our senses will be invited to interact with what we otherwise might deem invisible.

The sacraments are a way to experience the “sacred unseen.”

We will taste, and we will touch.

We will see, and we will smell.

We will hear the familiar words of communion.

And we will hear a blessing said over us.

This day is also a soothing feast for the soul because in each of the sacraments we are reminded of the loving promises of God.

In our Old Testament reading, we heard some of these promises.

In the passage from Isaiah we heard God saying . . .

I have called you by name and you are mine.

I will be with you when you are going through difficult times.

I am your God. I am your Savior. I have redeemed you.

You are precious in my sight and honored and I love you.

We also heard God mentioning the care God will give to those who are called by God’s name.

This may sound strange to us — the idea of being called by God’s name — but then we remember that during our baptisms, we are called by God’s name.

We are called by God’s name because we are baptized into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In the ancient world “being baptized into the Name of someone” would have indicate that the “baptized” person was closely bound to, or became the property of, the one into whose name he was “baptized.”¹

Another way of saying that is that when we are baptized into someone’s name, we come under their care.

Our baptisms remind us that we belong to God and are under God’s care.

Sacraments help us remember the covenant promises of God.

We don’t use the word covenant very often but the word covenant is critical to our understanding of God’s faithfulness.

A covenant is a promise to be faithful in a relationship.

For example, when people get married they make a covenant promise to be faithful to each other.

Long, long ago, God committed to be in relationship with humanity.

God said — “I will be your God and you will be my people.”

God promised to be faithful and God has been faithful since the very beginning.

In the sacraments, we are reminded of this faithfulness of God from the very beginning.

¹ Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, “Baptism.”

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They are a reminder that God is always faithfulness — even when we are not faithful.

Sacraments are also a reminder of our promises.

Each year on the Baptism of the Lord Sunday, we pause in this place and create the opportunity for us to say again what we believe and to say yes again to God.

We commit ourselves again to the faithfulness of God and to our desire to be in relationship with God.

Many of us were baptized as infants.

When infants are baptized, of course, they do not actually speak or consent to the baptism.

An infant baptism is a reminder that God is the primary One who is at work.

A sleeping baby or a crying baby remind us that God is faithful regardless of what we are doing or how we are acting.

It is a long tradition for the Church to offer a Re-affirmation of Baptism.

For those who were baptized as infants, the Re-affirmation of Baptism provides an opportunity to reaffirm the covenant that was made when they were too young to fully participate in the covenant transaction.

For those who were baptized as adults, the re-affirmation provides an opportunity to return to the promises made and renew them.

In the sacraments, God is offering us a tangible reminder of God’s faithfulness and love. We can hear God saying, I will be your God.

In the sacraments, we are offered an opportunity to say our yes. We can hear ourselves answering “and we will be Your people.”

We have been focusing on the promises of God that we witness in the sacraments..

And we have been preparing for the reaffirmation of our own promises.

But don’t want to miss that God is present and active in these sacraments.

These sacraments are a space where God is at work, and they are meant to be transformative.

As I was preparing for this message, I ran across a description that helps capture this sense of transformation. Believe it or not, the description is a pickle recipe . . . dating from 200 B.C.

Let me explain . . .

There are two ancient Greek words for the process of baptism.

There is “bapto” and there is “baptizo.”

We want to note here that even though there are two Greek words for baptism — only one — “baptizo” is used for the baptisms described in the New Testament.

So what is the difference between “bapto” and “baptizo”?

Both “bapto” and “baptizo” carry the idea of dipping or immersing something.

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In ancient Greek texts, we can read of a garment being dipped or immerse. We can read of a pitcher being dipped into a well to get water.

So why does the Bible only use “baptizo”?

“The clearest example that shows the meaning of baptizo is a text from the Greek poet and physician Nicander, who lived about 200 B.C.”

This text contains a pickle recipe — of all things — but this recipe ‘ . . . is helpful because it uses both words’ — both “bapto” and “baptizo”.

Perhaps we have other pickle makers here this morning, but “Nicander says that in order to make a pickle, the vegetable should first be ‘dipped’ (baptô) into boiling water and then ‘baptised’ (baptizô) in the vinegar solution.

Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution. But the first is temporary. The second, the act of baptising the vegetable, produces a permanent change.²

You see, baptism is designed to transformation.

The sacraments are a means of opening us to the work of God in the world and in our lives.

May we be open to the Spirit at work.

² Strong’s G-907, “Baptism.”