

## Baptism of Jesus/Cannon Baptism

*Here is my servant, in whom my soul delights.* Isaiah 42:1

*Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.* Matthew 3:13

In a few moments we will welcome Lindsay Marshai Cannon into the Body of Christ through the sacrament of Holy Baptism, and what a blessed moment that will be for all of us here at St. John's. I can't remember another adult baptism I've celebrated; so I believe this is a first for us, a new tradition. What's different about it?

Well, for one thing, parents, in my experience, generally chose the date for a baptism based on when grandparents and godparents can be present. And that 's certainly what I encourage. But Lindsay picked the date for her baptism based on the Prayerbook rubrics and the liturgical calendar. She picked the Baptism of Jesus as a special time for her own initiation into the Church. And that's special for us.

And of course, when we baptize an infant or child, the parents and godparents are the ones who make promises for, and on behalf of, the child. They hope and pray, and intend, that the child will grow up to espouse those vows, and to take on the adult commitments of the faith. But there are no guarantees. In this case Lindsay is taking on the awesome challenges and promises of Christian faith and practice for herself. That's special as well.

And what are those challenges, what are those promises? First we hear from the prophet Isaiah, a word about the Servant. *I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.* Every time we hear this reading, we, as the Church, must decide again who this Servant is. Who is it that *Isaiah had in mind?*

It's easy for us Christians, in the aftermath of Christmas and during Epiphany, to read and hear the Servant as Jesus, the messenger of the Good News. But is that too limiting? Is the Servant more ancient than Jesus, or more contemporary, or all of the above? Are we the Servant? Is Lindsay the Servant?

We know this. The Servant is infused and powered by God's wind or breath or Spirit, which blows newness into the world. The Spirit prepares the Servant to do what has been thought impossible: to bring justice to the nations.

That task will not be easy. But the Spirit will accompany the Servant, who will not faint or be crushed in this high-risk and conflictual undertaking. Moreover, the Servant will be gentle with others in work and in teaching. A tall order, and a complicated one: bringing justice and liberty with patience and compassion. But this is God's work for us, God's purpose. Are we Servants up to the task? Is Lindsay up to the task?

God's purpose is transcendent and sovereign; God's Servant is concrete and incarnate, a human justice-seeker and peace -maker. That is Isaiah's vision.

And then there's Jesus, and his urgency about being baptized by John. I remember Gretchen's excellent sermon last year on this Sunday, when she talked about Jesus' baptism as act and symbol of his very humanness and solidarity with all humanity; our needs are his needs, just as his purposes are our purposes. The baptism of the Son of God joins him with us, his followers, in carrying out what God requires.

Matthew's version of the baptism combines two contrasting images of Jesus as the Son of God. One is of his royal kingship, his specialness, his majestic uniqueness. *This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.*

The other image is of obedience, humility, and service to justice. *Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.* Jesus will embark, in his public ministry, upon the tasks laid out by Isaiah for the Servant to perform, tasks with a specific and a moral dimension: to bring about a reign where the hungry are fed, the thirsty are given drink, the naked are clothed, the sick are visited and the imprisoned are freed.

Moreover, Matthew's account of Jesus baptism tells us something of the nature of Christian baptism, its meaning for all of us, its meaning for Lindsay. When we are baptized we are given distinctive names, our baptismal names, and we are given as well a communal name: we are *Beloved*, we are *God's Child*, we are *pleasing to God*. And then we are also commissioned to faithful and obedient and humble service. We are to follow the path blazed by the Son of God from the waters of the Jordan through the triumph in Jerusalem to the hill at Calvary. We are called by name, and we are called to establish justice in the earth, to unite people everywhere, and to light up the nations.

Are we up to it? Lindsay, are you up to it? Well, the consolation and the inspiration of baptism, the promise of baptism, is that we do not have to answer this question singly, personally, uniquely. This is a question for the community, and we answer it together. Through our vows of baptism we answer YES! *Yes*, we promise: *we*

*will do justice, we will love kindness, we will walk humbly with God.* Together, we will undertake God's great commission. Together we will become the Servant.

When Lindsay and I were talking about baptism, I asked her what her baptism would mean to her. She said that her spiritual life felt like a big house that she was about to enter, and that baptism was the key that would open the door.

Lindsay, the house of God has many, many rooms. We rejoice together that you have found this room, here at St John's, and together we welcome you into God's glorious and infinite mansion. May you inhabit it with us, and with all the saints, with joy and blessing.

**Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen**