



# Grace Church

The Rev. Dr. Matthew Calkins  
Rector

## Water

### **Sermon for Epiphany 1, the Baptism of our Lord, January 8, 2017**

*Readings:* Isaiah 42:1-9; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17; Psalm 29

*Sermon text:* And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:13-17

This morning, the first Sunday after the Epiphany, we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. As part of the service we will renew our Baptismal Covenant. But we don't have any baptisms scheduled so we won't get to hear the wonderful prayer at the end of baptisms. Unless I read it now. So I will.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon *these* your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised *them* to the new life of grace. Sustain *them*, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give *them* an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. *Amen.*

I love that prayer. I pray for all of these gifts for all of you. Wisdom, courage, love, and the gift of joy and wonder in all of God's works.

Here's one of God's works: Water. This is a bowl of fresh clean water melted from snow that fell yesterday.

Water. When it falls from the sky and runs in the rivers, we take it for granted. And it can be a bother; it snowed again yesterday, I had to shovel off the car and drive carefully. But it is a great privilege to be able to take water for granted; most people in the world do not have that luxury. Nicholas Kristof writes in the *NY Times* today, "a severe drought has led crops to wilt across seven countries in southern Africa. The result is acute malnutrition for 1.3 million children in the region." His report of a particular place and family in the African island country of Madagascar is heartbreaking. I commend Episcopal Relief and Development as our arm of assistance in these areas and encourage you to contribute.

Water. There is plenty of it on earth—over 70% of the earth’s surface is under water. But 97% of earth’s water is ocean water. Only 2.5% is fresh water, and 99% of that is locked up in ice caps or in groundwater. Less than 0.3% of all freshwater is in rivers, lakes, and the atmosphere. You get the picture—again—water is precious.

Water is not native to this planet. Did you know that? I didn’t. But, as I found doing some research for this sermon, water was part of the packet of dust and gas and other particles from exploded suns when our solar system was formed some 4.5 billion years ago. In the heat and force of the sun’s initial ignition, all water was vaporized and the strong storm of solar radiation blew the gas until it was sufficiently far away to freeze into meteors and comets—most of which today circle the perimeter of the solar system in the asteroid belt. But about 4 billion years ago, after the earth had formed as a rocky irregular mass closer to the sun, the gas giants Neptune and Saturn pulled a huge stream of these meteors and asteroids into the path of the earth and there was an incredible period of bombardment. Picture millions of meteoric water balloons hitting the earth over millions of years with enough water to fill the oceans—and one mini planet impact that knocked off part of the earth and fused with it to become the moon. Water on the moon is frozen but earth developed an atmosphere and thawed the ice. Carbon and water—the necessary basic ingredients of life—were in place; the table was set. God truly blessed this blue jewel of the solar system. Life started in the oceans a few millions years after the earth cooled and settled down. And here we are today. By the way, some of this information dates from 2014 after space probes reached the asteroid belt and took careful measurements that have led scientists to a better understanding of how water came to earth. Will wonders ever cease? I hope not.

So water came to earth billions of years ago and has basically been recycled since. You drink the same water that dinosaurs did. It fell from the sky—not just as rain but from space. Amazing.

Listen in the light of this to a passage from Isaiah, a passage that is part of what the Book of Common Prayer calls the second song of Isaiah. It is found as one of the canticles used for Morning Prayer.

For as rain and snow fall from the heavens \*  
and return not again, but water the earth,  
Bringing forth life and giving growth, \*  
seed for sowing and bread for eating,  
So is my word that goes forth from my mouth; \*  
it will not return to me empty;  
But it will accomplish that which I have purposed, \*  
and prosper in that for which I sent it.

The word of God, how does it get here?

Ancient writers—and later theologians like Calvin—spoke of God’s two books: the book of nature and the book of scripture. The first we read through the lens of science, the second through the lens of faith (both science and faith use reason—inquiry and discernment, and

both are motivated by wonder and love). One provides answers to how things work. The other as to why there are things and what their value and ultimate purpose is. One tells us how we got here. One tells us where we should go from here. I believe they are not in conflict but complementary. And it is a poor man who is given two hands but chooses only to use one, who has eyes to see but not ears to hear.

Holy scripture, the word of God written, was originally spoken and heard. As Christians, our holy scriptures include both the Old and New Testaments, the Hebrew and Greek scriptures—two witnesses to the acts of God. The Old tells of the creation of the cosmos—God said, Let there be light—and the subsequent creation of life, humanity, a particular people and their laws and history. The New speaks of one who came from among that people, but who was also present with God in the beginning, eternally: In the beginning was the Word. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us: Jesus Christ, child of Mary, son of God.

We celebrated his birth on Christmas—and this morning we remember the day some thirty years later when he was baptized in the Jordan river by John. In Luke's gospel they are cousins, on the others they seem to be more teacher and student. But in any case John recognized Jesus as someone extraordinary, the one he had been waiting for, the Lamb of God. He thought himself unworthy to baptize Jesus but Jesus insisted.

Why? Because this was part of the Incarnation. The Incarnation means that God did not come among us in the appearance of human form, but bodily, fully human. As the Son, God was baptized into the river of human experience, its temptations, callings, sins, sufferings, love, joy, faith and doubt. To be fully with and for us, he took the plunge.

Not only that. Jesus, having come to the water, felt—saw, heard—the Spirit descend on him and the voice of the Father call him Son, Beloved. What should he do next? The Spirit drove him into the desert where, without food and water, he struggled with another voice, that of the Tempter. All of this was necessary for him to be fully human and also fully aligned with the will of the Father, inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit.

As Jesus, so we. We are born both in the world of nature and spirit. We have access not only to the water of biological life but that of spiritual life. This is what Jesus called *living water*, and which he invited those who believe in him to drink deeply of: “On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as<sup>[a]</sup> the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” (John 7:37).

Let us then join the prophet Isaiah, who wrote:

Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation.

And on that day you shall say, give thanks to the Lord and call upon his Name;

Isaiah 12:4-6

In the name of Christ, Amen.

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