*Christ is bathed in light; let us also be bathed in light. Christ is baptized; let us also go down with him, and rise with him.*

*In the name of God; Father , Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Good morning!

This past Thursday evening, our wonderful community observed one of the Church's great feasts, the Epiphany. On that day, we delight in how God not only sent his Son to save his chosen people Israel, but indeed manifested his salvation to all people in the shining of the manger's star, where the Word made Flesh laid his sweet head. I have been celebrating the Holy Mysteries of the Eucharist on the Epiphany for many years, but in all honesty, I don't think I've been so personally moved on the day as I was last week. We entered with very subdued lighting, and we were able to enjoy much of the evenings offering by candlelight. It was a unique joy to look out into the congregation with their little lights, flickering against the darkened surroundings; it was a unique visual representation of what we are meant to do as Christian people. It was a poignant reminder that with God's help, we are all lights against the darkness.

And today, on the Sunday after Epiphany, we celebrate yet another manifestation of God's amazing beauty and purpose as we remember once again Jesus' own baptism in the river Jordan. Our old friend St. Luke, who had spent much of the first chapters of his account of the Gospel, has brought us to one of the great punctuation points in Jesus' life. Recall that during Advent, we heard a little bit about Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist. We heard how he, like Jesus was a child of promise, as Gabriel announced his birth to Zachariah. Unlike Mary, he didn't believe the angel's message and yet rejoiced when Elizabeth bore him a son. Luke masterfully tied Jesus' origins to John's and in his third chapter that attention to detail really pays off because Jesus and John are reunited in Messianic expectation and vocation.

John was placed directly in the strong prophetic line of ancient Israel, and though his ministry was tied to the wilderness around the banks of the Jordan, the spiritual ground he meant to cover was a call to repentance. He was gaining popularity among the people around him as they were hoping to see the coming of the Messiah, as they wanted to return to covenant faithfulness with God, in the hopes that God would do something about all those nasty Romans. Unsurprisingly, John's message was not dissimilar to Jesus' in broad strokes: Love God, be kind to everyone, take care of the poor. But when the people started thinking that he was the Messiah, he denied it outright. After all, he met the true Messiah while still in the womb. He knew the Son of God was coming into his own in the fullness of time. When Luke described the moment of Jesus' baptism, I think it's remarkably matter-of-fact even as the event's imagery kindles our imagination. The Holy Spirit descended as a dove, the Father's voice announced the Beloved Son, with whom He was still pleased. John had prepared the way for this moment: Jesus' Messianic mission was about to begin in earnest and was doing so in dramatic fashion as the skies opened up with Heavenly Light over that fateful river.

What an honor then, to continue that which Jesus inaugurated all those centuries ago. Today, the Jordan is on a distant shore, but the waters of our beautiful baptismal font will welcome our dear sister Romy (or Rosemary) into the Household of the Messiah. We as a parish Church will be witness to and participating in the movement of the Holy Spirit among the people in water and prayer; and this darling little one will take her place among the redeemed saints of God, here at St. John's, to grow in grace and favor. Today, we would do well to listen to the voice of God in Scripture as she, like Jesus before her, is indeed beloved. And with her God is well pleased. The same is true of each one of us who has committed to the call of Jesus Christ, responding to the grace of our own baptisms. Rejoice, dear ones, that we are so well loved by our God:

The Lord [who] shall give strength to his people;

the Lord [who] shall give his people the blessing of peace...

For several years, I have been closing my sermon on this Sunday by sharing a quote from one of my favorite theologians from the ancient Church. All the way back in the fourth Century, St. Gregory Nazianzan wrote to his congregation the following:

“Today let us do honour to Christ’s baptism and celebrate this feast in holiness. Be cleansed entirely and continue to be cleansed. Nothing gives such pleasure to God as the conversion and salvation of [human beings,] for whom his every word and every revelation exist. He wants you to become a living force for all [humanity,] lights shining in the world. You are to be radiant lights as you stand beside Christ, the great light, bathed in the glory of him who is the light of heaven. You are to enjoy more and more the pure and dazzling light of the Trinity, as now you have received – though not in its fullness – a ray of its splendour, proceeding from the one God, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power for ever and ever.”

I hope this piece of one of his sermons encourages and blesses you as it has me on this Feast of the Baptism of our Lord. May you radiate the light of Christ throughout the coming week and beyond, beloved!

In his name and for his sake. Amen.