

## **Sermon**

### **Our Genealogy**

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When we meet Jesus at the Jordan River, it's the first time we see him as an adult, stepping out from the shelter of his childhood and into the calling that will shape the rest of his life. These few verses in today's gospel draw our eyes to the moment of baptism itself, but they also invite us to look backward—to remember all the people and communities who made it possible for Jesus to reach this moment at all. He did not arrive at the river on his own. He survived because others listened for God's voice and chose to protect a vulnerable child.

In the world Jesus was born into, childhood was fragile. Nearly half of all children never reached the age of ten. Disease, hunger, violence, and poverty claimed countless young lives. And Jesus faced even more danger—political forces that sought to erase him before his life had truly begun. Yet he was carried, sheltered, and guided by a network of care: by his family, by ancestors who shaped his story, and even by strangers who responded to God's prompting.

We asked the question on Christmas Eve, why be born this way? Having no sense of sheltered prepared for the birth, parents – young and confused and ultimately giving birth in a barn. Why not appear in the cities? The

temple? And today, I ask a similar question – why baptism this way? With John in the woods with people who didn’t quite fit the mold to be considered with any standing in the temple community? And why baptism at all? Jesus didn’t wash or cleanse – He was without sin. His baptism has nothing to do with ours or maybe it does...

When Jesus steps into the water, he does so as someone formed by community. And today’s gospel invites us to see our own baptisms in that same light. None of us came to faith alone. We were shaped by people who prayed for us, taught us, held us, and stood with us. And in a week when the world feels especially wounded, this story calls us to remember our responsibility to one another—to be the kind of community that protects, nurtures, and lifts up every child of God.

And that matters today, maybe more than ever. Because this has been a week when the world has felt unbearably fragile again. We’ve watched lives cut short, families shattered, communities shaken by violence and loss. It’s the kind of week that reminds us how vulnerable we all are, how quickly the ground can shift beneath our feet, and how desperately we need one another.

So when we picture Jesus stepping into the Jordan, we’re not just remembering a moment in ancient history. We’re remembering a truth that speaks right into the ache of this week: **none of us stands alone** – even after death. Jesus’ baptism is a reminder that God’s work in the world is always carried by communities—by people who choose compassion over fear,

protection over indifference, courage over despair. The same kind of community that sheltered Jesus is the kind of community we are called to be for one another now.

In a week marked by tragedy, I invite you to lean into that calling. To remember that our baptisms knit us into a body where we hold each other up, where we refuse to let evil have the last word, where we commit again to protecting the vulnerable and tending to the wounded. The waters that claimed Jesus claim us too—not just as individuals, but as a people bound together for the sake of healing and hope.

And so we come to this week—this heartbreak, disorienting week—when the news has carried stories we wish we could unhear. Lives lost too soon. Families plunged into grief. Communities shaken by violence, hatred, or senseless tragedy. We've watched images and heard names that should never have had to be spoken in this way. And whether the events happened close to home or far from us, they land in our bodies the same way: with a heaviness that makes us wonder how much more the world can bear.

It's into that heaviness that this gospel speaks. Because Jesus' baptism isn't just a moment of divine affirmation; it's a moment that acknowledges the real world he is stepping into—a world marked by danger, injustice, and suffering. The same world we are living in now. And just as Jesus did not reach the waters of the Jordan alone, the people affected by this week's tragedies do

not face their grief alone. Their pain becomes our shared responsibility, our shared calling.

Baptism names us as people who refuse to look away. People who stand with the vulnerable. People who believe that God's voice still breaks through the chaos and says, "You are my beloved." Even when the world feels anything but beloved.

So as we hold the weight of this week, we do so as a baptized people—claimed, called, and bound to one another. We stand in a genealogy that will not let us go. We are an enlightened people because we know Christ. We understand the ministry of the least, the lost and the hopeless. Our baptism created us for something bigger than we are individually. And if you were wondering what you've done all that work for – read Bible verse after Bible Verse, attended church week after week, participated in mission year after year...you did it for this. Consider it your Masters Class preparing you to stand in love against hate. To believe that standing in its face will eliminate the weakness and hate and illuminate the power of community and love. This is your superpower. When we do this, we remember that the same Spirit who descended on Jesus descends on us, urging us toward compassion, courage, and the kind of communal care that can hold a hurting and confused world.

And into this moment—into our grief, our questions, our longing for something steadier than the news cycle—Isaiah's words speak with surprising clarity. "Here is my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul

delights.” It’s the same divine delight we hear at the Jordan, the same voice naming Jesus as beloved. But Isaiah goes further, painting a picture of what God’s chosen one does in a world that is bruised and trembling.

Isaiah says this servant will bring forth justice, but not by force or spectacle. He will not break a bruised reed. He will not snuff out a dimly burning wick. In other words, God’s answer to a hurting world is not more violence, not more fear, not more crushing weight. God’s answer is a servant who moves with tenderness, who protects what is fragile, who refuses to give up on even the faintest flicker of hope.

That is the One who steps into the Jordan. And that is the One who steps into this week with us.

When we look at the tragedies that have unfolded—lives lost, communities shaken, families left with empty chairs and unanswered questions—we can feel like the world is nothing but bruised reeds and dim wicks. But Isaiah reminds us that God does not discard what is bruised. God does not give up on what feels close to going out. Instead, God draws near. God upholds. God breathes life where we fear there is none left.

And because we are baptized into Christ, this becomes our calling too. We are not spectators to the world’s pain. We are participants in God’s healing work. We are the ones sent to cradle what is fragile, to guard what is flickering, to stand alongside those who are bowed down by grief. Isaiah calls the servant

“a light to the nations”—and through our baptism, that light is entrusted to us as well.

So in a week when darkness feels thick, we remember that our calling is not to match the world’s despair but to bear Christ’s light. To be the kind of community that refuses to break what is already bruised. To be the kind of people who protect the vulnerable, who speak truth with gentleness, who embody the justice that looks like compassion in motion.

The word I want you to carry with you this week is *beloved*. Let it echo in your mind and settle in your heart. You are God’s beloved—claimed, held, and called. Not because you’ve earned it, not because you’ve done everything right, but because God’s love has always been reaching toward you.

And when you begin to see yourself that way, something shifts. You start to see others through that same lens. You notice the beauty in people you might have overlooked. You recognize the pain in those who are hurting. You become more attuned to the quiet dignity in every human life. Seeing yourself as beloved opens your eyes to the belovedness of the world around you.

So as you step into the wilderness of the week ahead—whatever that wilderness looks like—go as someone who is not alone. Go as part of a community shaped by compassion, grounded in grace, and committed to lifting one another up. Go as people who choose unity over division, tenderness over fear, courage over despair.

And may the voice that spoke over Jesus at the Jordan speak over you as well: *You are my beloved. In you, I delight.* Carry that truth with you, and let it shape the way you move through this world.

Amen