

**Many Waters, One Baptism**  
(Luke 3:15-17, 21-22)

It started with a single tear. One tiny drop first shed, not in sorrow, anguish or pain, but out of love – out of love for the world. The tear ran slowly down the smiling, godly face, dropping and then falling into time and space. And it fell and fell, toward the earth, until it splashed down – in silence – on a lofty jagged peak.

And not long afterward another tear came. It too fell free of the smiling face to land atop that same place. And then another, and another until the face gushed forth with laughter while crying at the same time. And more and more tears rained down upon that mountain top.

One after another the tear drops began to freeze in that high mountain place, forming an icy moraine in craggy crevices. There the tear drops remained suspended in icy sleep.

Then came the spring when that same face shined down with the warmth of the sun to awake each frozen tear from its winter rest. As the tear drops awoke they began to slowly trickle down the steep mountain side, each one making its own way. Some spread out on the rocky slope while others found porous soil beneath the rock and were absorbed by the mountain.

Many tears ran down the mountain, gathering great speed from the steepness of the rock surface. As the tear drops raced for the flat plain below, they began to come together to form larger rivulets until coming to rest at the base of the mountain, their energy now spent. There they began to slowly

form into a small, still pool. Without the steep mountain slope to propel them, they began to stagnate. Their journey, it seemed, had come to an end.

But as more tear drops awoke from their icy sleep and made their way down the mountain, the pool began to grow. Now a collection of many tear drops, each one gave up its identity for the sake of the community that was taking shape.

As the community of tears grew, life was being regenerated and energy soon began to build. Soon the pool was swelling and the community of tears began to slowly reach outward to the limits that constrained this new life. Strengthened by numbers the pool overflowed with energy and life renewed. Just as God gave birth to that first tear drop, now God was creating something new – the river. Please pray with me.

And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our collective hearts be pleasing to you, O God, Midwife to the waters of our life. Open our hearts and minds to the scripture read and the word proclaimed that we might be refreshed by the waters of our baptism. In the precious name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

One day many years ago I set out on journey to fulfill a great need in my life. I traveled to place near Kremmling, Colorado, about one-hundred fifty miles northwest of Denver.

Now skiers know Kremmling as the last town you go through before climbing Rabbit Ears Pass on the way to Steamboat Springs. But it was summertime and my objective was not skiing.

Just before you get to Kremmling, if you know where to look, you will find a trailhead that leads away from U.S 40 to a small pool of water not unlike the tear-filled one I just described.

The pool is small and unassuming, set in a place of solitude. If you are quiet you can hear the trickling of the water as the pool is fed by a small rivulet oozing out of the mountain side. At first, there is nothing distinguishing about this place. That is until you notice the weatherworn wooden sign that reads: "These are the headwaters of the Colorado River."

It's in this place that God gives birth to one of the most powerful forces in creation, one powerful enough to have carved out the Grand Canyon – a mile deep and a mile wide in some places. From a single tear a great river was born. Nothing in Creation happens by accident. The waters of the world were given birth and designed for purpose.

Born of God's tears – tears of joy – for God's own people, there are many waters, all with divine power inspired by those same tears. Those waters are symbols for many aspects of our Christian faith, as revealed to us in Second Isaiah.

Listen again to the opening verses of Chapter 43. "This is what the Lord says, 'I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers they will not sweep over you.'" We have been called by name my

friends and claimed by God. God calls us from the other side of the river and beckons us to pass through the waters. And there are many waters.

*Water is sanctuary.* We dwell suspended and protected, secure in the comforting waters of our mothers' womb, much like the nation of Israel was protected from Pharaoh's armies by the waters of the Red Sea.

*Water is birth.* We pass through the waters of the womb coming into life, much like the nation of Israel passed through the waters as they came out of out of captivity into life.

*Water is judgment and justice.* When God tells us that, "When we pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over us" this means we will be judged with fairness and, as the prophet Amos said, "... let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. [Amos 5:24]"

*Water is cleansing.* It is by water that God redeems us, washes away our sin, and even uses that same water to wipe our slates clean of the past.

For more "water" symbolism we need only look to the gospel lesson this morning. Luke's account of the baptism of Jesus is a familiar one. Luke says, "When all the people were being baptized Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

When Jesus rose up out of the waters of the River Jordan, having been baptized by his cousin, John, he began to pray. But as he prayed he was interrupted by God. "You are my Son ..." God said. Coming out of the

water Jesus received two things that would be essential to his ministry.

First of all, he was given his identity. “You are my Son.” His identity – his relationship to God – is confirmed. “You are my Son.” By his baptism, Jesus’ place in heaven and on earth is made known to him; he is marked as God’s Son, called by name and claimed by God. And there on the banks of the Jordan – on that day – the foundation for the truth of the gospel message was laid down.

I hope you noticed in Luke’s account that Jesus was baptized along with “... all the other people.” All the people received their identity as their relationship to God was also established right along with Jesus. And it’s no different for us today. By our baptism, we are marked as Christians, given our identity in our relationship to God. We are called by name and claimed as children of God. Children of God!

Like Jesus, we are marked as children of God by our baptism. The second thing Jesus received from God at his baptism was love and acceptance. God said, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well-pleased.” Words like these – *son*, *love*, and *acceptance* – are terms of endearment that speak to family relationships.

All of us need to know that we are loved and accepted. We need that sense of well-being that comes from being surrounded by a community of faithful believers. Our care and well-being is entrusted to all baptized

Christians when we pass through the baptismal waters.

Regardless of age, the Christian community responds in faith to God’s grace by claiming and incorporating the newly baptized into Christ’s holy church. Parents and sponsors, pastors and congregations, all take vows to nurture the newly baptized and to see that they are raised and encouraged in the faith.

God speaks to us from the waters. And there are many waters. While there are many waters, there is only one baptism. Baptism is not repeatable. It doesn’t need to be repeated. It’s God breaking into our lives that makes baptism effective. When we submit to God’s grace in baptism or in confirmation we enter into a covenant with God that lasts for eternity. Baptism is a once-in-a-lifetime rite.

God’s commitment to be in relationship with us, to love us and accept us, is genuine and always reliable. It is steadfast and eternal – so much so that it is sealed with water

On the other side of the Baptismal Covenant, however, our commitment is less than reliable. In our humanity we fall down from time to time – failing to live up to our side of the covenant. It’s for this reason that, from time to time, we need to renew or reaffirm our commitment to the Baptismal Covenant. And we’re going to do just that this morning. Please follow the slides and join in the congregational responses where indicated and remember your baptism.