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St. James', Mt. Airy  
1/8/17

Epiphany 1A /  
Baptism of Our Lord  
Isaiah 42:1-9  
Psalm 29  
Acts 10:34-43  
Matthew 3:13-17

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;  
take our hands and work through them;  
take our hearts and set them on fire.  
Amen.**

Last Thursday the 12 Days of Christmas wrapped up. Friday was Epiphany, the day we celebrate the arrival of the Magi to Bethlehem laden with their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And with it, the big story we built toward all through Advent, and then celebrated with joy and candlelight and carols, was over – the decorations are now down, we are past the winter solstice and so the light is slowly returning each day, and we are ready to hunker for the winter and look forward to spring.

But Epiphany, and the season that follows it, is much more than a capstone to Christmas and a season for waiting for Lent and Easter.

This season, which we begin today with our celebration and remembrance of Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan, is a multi-week time to reflect on the profound gift of Christmas – that God **was** and **is** with us – and that God's presence transforms us.

One theologian friend put it this way: In this season we celebrate the fine and graceful art of **getting it**. Epiphanies are few. In our lives we may only hear tell and never once stumble into our own. Nonetheless, we are called to be stargazers, wanderers, seekers of wisdom and truth. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tripp Hudgins

This is a piece of what we are called into in our baptism.

But today, on this Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, which falls on the heels of Christmas and Epiphany, it also means **this**:

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
    To find the lost,  
    To heal the broken,  
    To feed the hungry,  
    To release the prisoner,  
    To rebuild the nations,  
    To bring peace among people,  
    To make music in the heart.<sup>2</sup>

This classic poem from Howard Thurman is a call into living life as followers of Christ.

Not only does it hearken to scripture and the words of Jesus, but it is a list of how to live the promises we make in baptism. Can you hear the deep resonances?

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers?

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<sup>2</sup> Howard Thurman "The Work of Christmas" in *The Mood of Christmas & Other Celebrations* (1985)

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

Today we will baptize Colin & Brady – and their parents and Godparents will make these promises for and with them – and the rest of us will promise to support them in their life in Christ.

But today is a gift for all of us because it is also a chance to reaffirm the promises we made in our own baptism – a reminder that this is the event from which our identity as Christians flows – it tells us the deep truth of who and whose we are.

Verna Dozier, Episcopal laywoman and theologian, wrote that with his baptism, Jesus' ministry commenced.

We don't have many stories about Jesus between his birth and his baptism. It was this event, of being plunged into the water of the River Jordan by John, that marked the beginning of his public ministry.

In fact, if you look at what comes directly after today's Gospel passage, you will find the story of the temptation of Jesus, followed by the beginning of his ministry in Galilee with the calling of the first disciples, teaching in synagogues and healing people, and then the sermon on the mount with the beatitudes.

We, like Jesus, aren't meant to live settled lives, resting on the promise that we are God's beloved. **We are God's beloved – and**, we are also charged with making the source of that love known in the world around us, because it is a love so powerful it can transform the world around us.

This is the work of Christmas, the work of Epiphany, the work of baptism – my question for the St. James' community is, how will we do this work together in the year to come?

I pray for God's guidance for this community, and for God's blessing on Colin & Brady as they join this family of families we call the church, that we may all radiate God's love and be stargazers, wanderers, and seekers of wisdom and truth – today, in this season, throughout the year, and all our lives.

~ AMEN ~