



Photo by JESUS MAFA. John baptizes Jesus, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.
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“From the moment we claim the truth of being the beloved,
we are faced with the call to become who we are.”

~ Henri Nouwen

OUR MINISTRY TEAM

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HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

BAPTISM OF CHRIST

January 07, 2024, 10:55 am

** Your whole self is welcomed here. Please feel free to take care of your body during worship in ways that work for you.*

Prelude

“Jesus Is Here Right Now”

L. Roberts

Chiming of the Hour

Welcome and Announcements

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

One: May the peace of the Christ Child be with you.

Many: And also with you.

Introit

“Holy Ground”

Beatty/Davis

This is holy ground. We're standing on holy ground.

For our God is present and where God is is holy. (2x)

We are standing on holy ground,

And I know that there are angels all around.

Let us praise Jesus now.

We are standing in God's presence on holy ground.

* Call to the Heart

Terry Raley-Dennis

Please take a comfortable posture that supports your worshipping, reading, and singing...

One: As your rivers, O God, flow around us,

Many: **we come to be washed by your grace.**

One: Your voice calls us to the water,

Many: **and we immerse ourselves in your love.**

One: Your Word descends upon us,

Many: **and you kindle in us the fire of your Spirit.**

One: You speak to us: You are my Beloved, my own, and I am so delighted in you.”

Many: **By your grace we receive your blessing, we accept your claim upon us, and we worship you with awe and gratitude. Alleluia!**

* Hymn 290

“Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart”
(vv 1,3 & 5)

MORECAMBE

Spirit of God, descend upon my heart;
Wean it from earth, through all its pulses move;
Stoop to my weakness, mighty as you are,
And make me love you as I ought to love.

Have you not bid us love you every way?
All, all your own: soul, heart, and strength, and mind;
I see your cross—there teach my heart to stay:
O let me seek you, and O let me find.

Teach me to love you as your angels love,
One holy passion filling all my frame;
The baptism of the heaven descended dove,
My heart an altar, and your love the flame.

Daily Affirmation

Ourselves: “I am precious in God’s sight, and God delights in me.”

Neighbor: “You are precious in God’s sight, and God delights in you.”

World: “We are precious in God’s sight, and God delights in us.”

Stories for All People

Laura Hankins

Prayers of the People

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

We can't start a spiritual journey on a negative foundation. If we just seek God out of fear or guilt or shame, we won't go very far. If we start negative, we stay negative. We have to begin positive—by a wonderful experience, by something that's larger than life, by something that dips us into the depths of our own being. That's what the word baptism means, "to be dipped into." Jesus is thirty years old when his baptism happens. According to Mark's Gospel, *he hasn't said a single thing up to now*. Until we know we're a beloved son or beloved daughter or even just beloved, we don't have anything to say. We're so filled with self-doubt that we have no good news for the world. In his baptism, Jesus was dipped in the unifying mystery of life and death and love. That's where it all begins—even for him! The unique Son of God had to hear it with his own ears and then he couldn't be stopped. Then he has plenty to say for the next three years, because he has finally found his own soul, his own identity, and his own life's purpose.

I am convinced that the reason people make great mistakes is because they have never heard what Jesus heard on the day of his baptism. They never heard another human voice, much less a voice from heaven, say to them, "You are a beloved son. You are a beloved daughter and in you I am well pleased." If we've never had anyone believe in us, take delight in us, affirm us, call us beloved, we don't have anywhere to begin. There's nothing exciting and wonderful to start with, so we spend our whole lives trying to say those words to ourselves: "I'm okay, I'm wonderful, I'm great." But we don't really believe it. The word has to come from someone greater than us. That's really a parent's primary job—to communicate to their child that they are a beloved, eternally-existing child of God. The world is over-flowing with people who never heard this foundational message.

The only purpose of the gospel, and even religion, is to communicate that one and eternal truth. Once we have that straight, nothing can stop us and no one can take it away from us, because it is given only, always, and everywhere by God—for those who will accept it freely. My only job and any preacher's job is to try to replicate and resound that eternal message of God that initiates everything good on this earth—You are beloved children of God!

One: May we hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church;

Many: Open our ears, our hearts, our minds.

Solo: Down Galilee's slow roadways a stranger traveled on
From Nazareth to Jordan to be baptized by John.
He went down to the waters like soldier, scribe, and slave,
But there within the river the sign was birth and grave.

All: Arising from the river he saw the heavens torn;
It seemed the sky so open revealed the Spirit's form.
The holy dove descended amid a glorious voice:
"You are my own beloved, my child, my heart, my choice."

We too have found a roadway; it led us to this place.
We all have had to travel in search of hope and grace.
But now beside this water again a voice is heard.
"You are my own, my chosen, beloved of your Lord."

* Gospel Lesson Mark 1:1-11 (CEB) Rev. Christopher Czarnecki
Our Gospel Lesson for today comes from the Mark 1:1-11, where Jesus is baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist...

The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God’s Son, happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah:

*Look, I am sending my messenger before you.
He will prepare your way, a voice shouting in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight.”*

John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. John wore clothes made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. He announced, “One stronger than I am is coming after me. I’m not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. And there was a voice from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.”

One: For the word of God in scripture, for the word of God among us, for the word of God within us.
Many: Thanks be to God.

The Good News

“You Are God’s Child, You Are Loved,
and With You God Is Well Pleased”

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Invitation to Generosity

Terry Raley-Dennis

Now is the time for our ministry of giving and sharing...

God is the giver of all good things, the one who fashioned each of us with unique gifts that together make the Body of Christ whole. In gratitude for all we have received, we offer our lives back to God – we share our time, our skills, our money and in so doing, we say “yes” to God’s invitation to join in kin-dom building work here on earth.

* Doxology

OLD HUNDREDTH

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God all creatures here below,
Praise God above all heavenly hosts,
Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

Prayer of Dedication and Thanksgiving (*unison*)

Terry Raley-Dennis

Let us join together in a unison prayer of dedication for all the gifts we have received...

Bountiful God, all that we offer you stems as a response from your generosity. May the gifts that we return to you become a blessing for your whole community, enriching and empowering us for the work to which you call us. Amen.

THE MYSTIC SUPPER

ALL ARE WELCOME AT CHRIST'S TABLE

The Invitation

One: God is with you.

Many: **And also with you.**

One: Lift up your hearts.

Many: **We lift them up to God.**

One: Let us give thanks to the Holy One, our God.

Many: **It is good and beautiful to give God our praise.**

One: We give you thanks, God, for in the beginning your Spirit brooded over the waters and you brought forth light.

Many: **Through the waters of the Red Sea, you brought your children to freedom.**

One: By the baptism of water and the word you created your church.

Many: **All the rivers of the world praise you, and the oceans sing your glory.**

One: Therefore, with all Creation, we sing your praise:

**Holy, holy, holy One, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

LAND OF REST

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of God.

Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna in the highest.

One: Blessed are all who come in your name, and blessed is Jesus, your Christ, baptized in the river Jordan, immersed in your grace, afloat on your love.

Many: **He washes our feet; he dries our tears; he gives us living water when we thirst for life.**

One: His grace washes us clean, and births us anew.

Many: **In his love we hear your blessing to us: "You are my Beloved, my own, with whom I am delighted."**

One: Baptized into his death, we are raised with him to new life.
Pour out your Holy Spirit on these gifts of bread and cup, that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ.

Many: **As you poured out your Spirit on Jesus at the river, pour out your Spirit on us, that we may be for the world the Body of Christ, one with Christ in death and resurrection, one in the Spirit, one in the Body of Christ, moved and empowered by your Spirit to bear your love into this world, in the name of Christ. Amen.**

Words of Institution

Sharing of the Elements

Music during Communion “Shall We Gather at the River” HANSON PLACE

**Shall we gather at the river, where bright angel feet have trod,
With its crystal tide forever flowing by the throne of God?**

Refrain:

**Yes, we'll gather at the river, The beautiful, the beautiful river;
Gather with the saints at the river that flows by the throne of God.**

**On the margin of the river, washing up its silver spray,
We will talk and worship ever, all the happy golden day. (R)**

**Ere we reach the shining river, lay we every burden down;
Grace our spirits will deliver, and provide a robe and crown. (R)**

**Soon we'll reach the silver river, soon our pilgrimage will cease;
Soon our happy hearts will quiver with the melody of peace. (R)**

Prayer of Dedication (*unison*)

Gracious God, we thank you for this mystery in which you have given yourself to us. Our little selves have been drowned in your love, filled at your ever-expanding table, and you have raised us up as members of the Body of Christ. May your eternal life flow through us with the power of your Spirit, by the grace of Christ, to change and bless this world. Amen.

Poem by *Steve Garnaas-Holmes* “Immersed in Blessing” Terry Raley-Dennis

**Baptized in your grace with Jesus, loving God, we sing your praise.
Echoing your own delight, with joy and thanks our song we raise.
Your beloved children, birthed anew and rising from your womb,
God, we bear your love through all our living, and beyond the tomb.**

**God you heal, forgive and nourish, and revive us breath by breath;
you restore our broken trust and save us from our fear of death.
Like a dry and withered plant revived by water at its root,
we are saved by streams of grace, for flourishing and bearing fruit.**

**Bathed in grace, immersed in blessing, joined with your Beloved Son,
how can we not love each other?— for your Spirit makes us One.
Carried on a stream of mercy, springs beneath and rain above,
may we flow with peace and in your Spirit flood the world with love.**

* Hymn 292

“Breathe on Me, Breath of God”

TRENTHAM

Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew;
That I may love the way you love and do what you would do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, until my heart is pure,
Until with you I will one will, to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, stir in me one desire:
That every earthly part of me may glow with holy fire.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, so shall I never die,
But live with you the perfect life of your eternity.

* Benediction

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

* Benediction Response

NEW DIMENSIONS

God of rainbow, fiery pillar, leading where the eagles soar,
We your people, ours the journey now and ever,
Now and ever, now and evermore.

Postlude

“You Are My Hiding Place”

M. Ledner

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Parts of the liturgy for today's service were written or adapted from Steve Garnaas-Holmes, Avery Arden at <https://binarybreakingworship.com/>, and UCC Worship Ways.

Candid photographs and/or video recording share our work and witness and invite others into the fellowship of our congregation. Some pictures/video may be published in church print publications, on our website or on our official social media sites. If you do not wish to have your image published, please contact the church office by phone or email.

WE PROVIDE OUR EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME WITH HELP FROM:

D Evans, Brian Hankins, Jo Ann Jellison, Shakti Subramanian

We welcome all in our congregation to participate! Do you like talking to interesting people and being helpful? Greeters and ushers, liturgists and readers are needed starting at 10:30 every

Sunday. Please sign up in the Gathering Room or on the SignUpGenius link:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C44ACAD23A2FE3-ushers>



WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOLY COVENANT

Stay connected! There are many new events in our future! Check out all the current happenings in the weekly newsletter via Constant Contact. *Not seeing it in your inbox? Sign-up here:*

<https://holycovenantucc.org/newsletters/>

FOR OUR CHILDREN

The Christian Ed team has put together some packets for kids who find themselves in church for the whole hour and need some activity. The packets for our “regulars” will have their names on them. Packets for others will specify “non-reader” or “young reader”, based on instructions to be read in the latter. The packets will include crayons and will be at the usher station.

MASKS WELCOMED

With respiratory virus season is upon us, and increasing levels of COVID, flu (influenza), RSV (respiratory syncytial virus), as well as colds and strep, please feel free to wear a mask to avoid exposure to colds and other respiratory viruses. Stay healthy and cozy this winter!

HOPEFUL SPIRITS GROUP MEETS WEEKLY

As part of our community outreach ministries, we welcome the Hopeful Spirits, a newly formed Community AA meeting. This group will meet each week on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings from 6:30 pm-7:30pm in the Conference Room. If you, or someone you know, is a “friend of Bill W” or a person who believes they may have a problem with alcohol, pass it on! This meeting is all inclusive for anyone in the community. Thank you for your support.

SONGS OF HOPE AND FREEDOM, WEEKEND OF JANUARY 20-21

Special Musical Event: Songs of Hope and Freedom with Reggie Harris, an interactive music workshop from **9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 20, 2024.**

Join us to enrich our worship and fellowship with this special musical event. No singing or musical ability required! An expert on the music of the Underground Railroad and the modern Civil Rights Movement, Mr. Harris will teach us songs that together, we can make a part of our regular worship service. Among his many awards are the Spirit of Folk Award and the W.E.B. Du Bois Legacy Award. He is also a teaching artist in an education program for the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and a Woodrow Wilson scholar. **Mr. Harris will also join us for worship on Sunday, Jan. 21.** We are publicizing this event widely so we

encourage Holy Covenant members to register ASAP! See the weekly newsletter for more information, or email Holly Middleton at hsmiddleton@gmail.com. This event is sponsored by your Racial Justice and Equity Committee. Thank you!

NEW MEMBER / INQUIRER CLASSES FEB. 4 & FEB. 18, 2024

Are you interested in learning more about our denomination, the United Church of Christ? Do you wonder why we do what we do? Would you like to get together with others who will be talking about it? Let's get together and talk about! Please RSVP the church office, 704-599-9810 or office@holycovenantuc.org. All are welcome!

PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER

Members

Linda Carver, Linda Clark, Kevin Decker, Linn Finger, Tom & Kathy Habel, Jim Humphrey, Sharon Landis, Sue & Bill Pascucci, Isabelle Reedy Powell, Jerry Rhyne, Ed & Beth Sharp, Cynthia & Tommy Simpson, Shakti Subramanian, Anita Taylor

Friends & Family Members

Karen & Billy (Kim Tyler), Melissa Brown, Craig Chrismon (Melissa Noll), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Judah L. Jones, Darin Jellison (Jo Ann Jellison), Matty & Simone McKinnon (Joy Decker), Roxanne & Moose Meyer (Dana Endsley & Mike Yonkovig), Marie Raley (Jean Raley-Dennis), Suzie & John Robinson (Dana Endsley & Mike Yonkovig), Michelle Sharp (Beth & Ed Sharp), Eulene Shepherd (Robert Shepherd), Joyce Tyler (Bill Tyler), Joyce Ward (Ed Vickery), Janet Wakefield (Linda Burby), Clifton Jr. & Gwendolyn Washington (Deborah Winston), John Zastrow (Barb Schneller)

If you wish to add someone to the list, please send a note to
prayers@holycovenantucc.org.