

Victoria Linner

The Baptism of our Lord, Year A, 11 January 2026

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Today, we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. It's our tradition in the Episcopal Church to view baptism as both our adoption into the Body of Christ and the beginning of a covenant that we make with God and each other.

That's all great for us, but today isn't the feast of our baptism. It's the feast of Jesus' Baptism. So, let's think about that. To me, it wouldn't make much sense for Jesus to be adopted into his own Body. Jesus didn't need repentance or the remission of sins. Jesus didn't become the Incarnate Word, the Son of God through his baptism. So, why did Jesus get baptized?

I think that maybe, somehow Jesus was baptized for us.

Baptism was an established practice before Jesus was baptized. In the verses before our Gospel reading for today, John the Baptist baptizes people from "Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan."¹ Jesus' baptism isn't what creates baptism. Instead, Jesus participates in this existing ritual.

And this was scandalous! John the Baptist pushes back against Jesus when Jesus approaches him for baptism.

The text says:

"John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'"

¹ Matt 3:5

We have to remember that just before this John says, “I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I, and I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

John pictured Jesus as the baptizer not the baptized. Already, in this early story of Jesus’ ministry he is subverting expectations. He is participating in human life in ways we wouldn’t expect.

Jesus leads by example. Jesus isn’t “above” our rituals and experiences. Jesus’ baptism occurs as part of the foundation of his public ministry in Matthew’s account of the Gospel. Likewise, for many people, baptism is the beginning of their journey of following Christ. And for Episcopalians, the Baptismal Covenant describes what it means to follow Christ. In the Baptismal Covenant, there are 5 calls to action that we agree to.

1. Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?
2. Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
3. Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
4. Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
5. Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

These calls to action are born out of what we know about the lives and teachings of Jesus and the apostles. In this covenant we are summarizing what we’ve learned from Jesus’ example. We are mirroring Jesus’ life. Baptism is initiation into the Body of Christ, and the living out the Baptismal Covenant is our ongoing commitment to being the Body of Christ.

Jesus Christ has given us our foundation of what right action is. We have morals. We have principles. We must not make excuses or try to downplay the moral failings that we are seeing and experiencing. Especially the moral failings of our fellow Christians. And we must not fall into the temptation to believe lies that are more comforting than harsh and painful truths.

As I'm sure you've heard, on Wednesday of this past week an ICE agent shot and killed a woman named Renee Nicole Good. This was not the first time federal immigration officers have killed a civilian. To name just one other victim, on September 12th of last year, an ICE agent shot and killed Silvero Villegas-Gonzalez in Chicago. There have been many other incidents where federal officers have shot, injured, or otherwise caused harm to civilians.

These killings and these attacks are not a matter of conservative vs liberal politics. It's not a matter of immigration policy. It's a matter of right and wrong.

In our reading from Acts, the apostle Peter says, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."

It matters to God that what we do is right, so baptism must not be misunderstood as a free pass to being acceptable to God. Instead, baptism is Christ's invitation to us to join him in the ongoing work of furthering God's kingdom here on Earth. In Jesus' baptism, he drew even nearer to us. Jesus showed solidarity with us through the incarnation and participation in human rituals and customs. Baptism now is our response to that solidarity.

So what should we do in this time of fear, grief, and pain?

We must stay the course. We know what our call is. We know what we who are baptized members of the Body of Christ have committed to. What exactly resisting evil and striving for justice will look like in practice will vary. Following our Baptismal Covenant is not passive. We will have to adapt. We will have to rise to the occasion. We will have to act even when we're not

100% sure what is best. We will have to be in conflict, in opposition, with those who are advocating for and causing harm to our neighbors. But our underlying ethos must not change.

I'd like to conclude with some words from Becca Good, who is Renee Good's widow. I've pulled just a few sentences, but you can read her full statement on mprnews.org, which is a local Minnesotan news organization.² She writes:

“Renee was a Christian who knew that all religions teach the same essential truth: we are here to love each other, care for each other, and keep each other safe and whole... I am now left to raise our son and to continue teaching him, as Renee believed, that there are people building a better world for him. That the people who did this had fear and anger in their hearts, and we need to show them a better way... We thank you for ensuring that Renee's legacy is one of kindness and love. We honor her memory by living her values: rejecting hate and choosing compassion, turning away from fear and pursuing peace, refusing division and knowing we must come together to build a world where we all come home safe to the people we love.”

The vision of a better world that Becca Good presents is possible. It may not feel like it now as tensions rise and bad situations are getting worse, but I really do believe that it's possible. There is a better way. Jesus Christ has demonstrated this better way in his baptism and subsequent ministry, in his life, death, and resurrection. When we affirm the Baptismal Covenant, our response is “I will, with God's help.” Can we come together to build a world where everyone is safe? Yes, we can and yes we will, with God's help. Amen.

² <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2026/01/09/renee-goods-wife-releases-statement-about-ice-shooting>

