



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

January 11, 2009

Epiphany 1B

By Reverend Donna Barr

I certainly don't consider myself a doting grandmother, but you all might have heard me speak just once or twice about our new granddaughter, Maggie. After one failed attempt in an agency and after 4 long years of waiting, Maggie was welcomed in our family on November 9, 2007. Maggie's Daddy Daniel and our youngest son Uncle Peter traveled to the Hunan Province of China to bring our little girl home to her waiting mother and very proud grandparents.

If you have had any experience with the adoption process, you know how long and arduous it can be. Financially challenging, emotionally draining, and spiritually empty are just some of my descriptions of the process. God certainly had his hand in this birthing because even in the face of all odds, I never heard Emily or Daniel give up hope. They were certain a child was born for them. As the days got closer to their number, Emily and Daniel sat on pins and needles as they waited to receive their referral, adoption lingo for the information and picture of their daughter. The agency sends you what they call "a stork alert" letting you know that in 24 hours you will be receiving your referral. With all our computer technology these days, the picture and information are sent to them through e-mail. Emily and Daniel received their long awaited "stork alert" in September and no longer was Maggie a figment of their imagination. In only about six weeks they would be able to see her with their very own eyes and not simply gaze at her e-mail picture.

Time and time again have I heard from adoptive parents, whether their child came from China, Russia, Guatemala or within the US that when they first laid eyes on their baby they knew instantly that she was theirs; that no other child in the world was meant for them. It didn't matter that this infant was not of their flesh and blood, that she had different colored hair or eyes or skin or that she came from across the globe; she was their beloved child now and always. I know this was how Emily and Daniel felt as they gazed upon Maggie for the first time.

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In Mark's Gospel Jesus' baptism is a dramatic moment in time - a dramatic moment when his identity as God's beloved child is revealed. As Jesus rises out of the waters of the Jordan, the heavens are torn apart, the Spirit descends upon him and a divine voice is heard declaring, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Rising out of the waters of baptism, Jesus, the humble carpenter from Nazareth, becomes known fully as the Son of God. Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark's version of the good news does not begin with the birth story. Plain-speaking Mark begins with Jesus being dunked in the waters of Jordan by the baptizer. In this very moment the incarnation is made real for Mark and his readers. As the heavens are torn apart and the Spirit hovers over Jesus the barrier between heaven and earth is destroyed forever and God now comes to dwell among us in His beloved Son.

Humanity's relationship with the divine will never be the same again. God is now with us in a radical new way - as one of us. Just as Jesus has been declared God's beloved Son, through his life and death, we too have been declared the beloved sons and daughters of God. When we came up out of the waters of our baptism, these same words were meant for us as they were for Jesus: "You are my Beloved; with you I am well pleased." In our baptism we were marked as Christ's own forever and welcomed into the household of God. It is often hard to accept our belovedness in the sight of God. Too easily we forget who and whose we are; but today Jesus' baptism reminds us of our baptism and "the bond which God established in our baptism is indissoluble," as our prayer book states. We are God's from now until eternity and nothing can separate us from God's love.

Like Emily and Daniel who loved their child a half a world away and when gazing upon her picture knew that she was meant to be their beloved daughter, so does our God gaze upon us and declare us His sons and daughters. No matter what we look like, where we come from or who we are, we can be assured that we are God's own beloved.

Listen now to these words from Henri Nouwen's book, *Life of the Beloved*, and imagine that they come from the same voice which spoke to Jesus as he was coming out the waters of Jordan. These words are meant for you just as much as the ones we heard from Mark's gospel were meant for Jesus. "I have called you by name, from the very beginning. You are mine and I am yours. You are my beloved, on you my favor rests. I have molded you in the depths of the earth and knitted you together in your mother's womb. I have carved you in the palms of my hands and hidden you in the

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shadow of my embrace. I look at you with infinite tenderness and care for you with a care more intimate than that of a mother for her child. I have counted every hair on your head and guided you at every step. Wherever you go, I go with you, and wherever you rest, I keep watch. I will give you food that will satisfy all your hunger and drink that will satisfy all your thirst. I will not hide my face from you. You know me as your own as I know you as my own. You belong to me. I am your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your spouse. Yes, even your child. Wherever you are I will be. Nothing will ever separate us. We are one."

Last Sunday, we read from Paul's letter to the Ephesians that God destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. My granddaughter Maggie is very special and very blessed - but no more so than all of us who have been mercifully adopted with God's gaze of love upon us..

I pray that in depths of your souls you can hear these words spoken to you and that you know them to be true. I pray that this day and each and everyday of your life you may never forget that God has declared you to be His beloved child and with you God is well pleased.

Amen

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