

Baptism of Our Lord ~ January 8, 2017
Sermon preached by the Rev. Daniel Vélez Rivera
Readings: Isaiah 42:1-9, Psalm 29, Acts 10:34-43, Matthew 3:13-17

Let us pray: Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his Name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Amen

It would be difficult for people of faith to over-celebrate the presence of Christ in the world. For example, today we celebrate three manifestations of Jesus in our lives. It is the feast of the Baptism of our brother and Savior Jesus; we also celebrate the curiosity, the instinct, and the energetic expectation that moved the spirit of the Three Wise Men, Melchior – a king of Persia, Gaspar – a king of India, and Balthazar – a king of Arabia, to see the epiphany of God at the time of Jesus' birth; and finally, we celebrate the blessing of new life in Jesus with the Holy Baptism of Luna Alexandra and Catherine Jane into the family of Christ. We have many reasons to celebrate the presence of Jesus in our lives, and that is exactly what we are doing here today!

I will repeat a part of today's reading from the Torah, the Old Testament. This selection from the book of the prophet Isaiah is referred to as the first Servant Song. I invite you to imagine Isaiah speaking to Luna and Catherine, and to each of you as well because all of us are God's chosen children, all of us are called to bring forth justice throughout the world. Listen and imagine these girls and yourselves in Isaiah's words. "Here you are, my servants, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon you; you will bring forth justice to the nations. You will not cry or lift up your voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed you will not break, and a dimly burning wick you will not quench; you will faithfully bring forth justice. You will not grow faint or be crushed until you have established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for your teaching."

In these verses, God commissioned and blessed his messenger to serve the world with love and justice. As servants of God we are called to be people of peace, not insolent braggers, but proclaimers of the spirit of God. Luna and Catherine are being baptized into service for God, commissioned to exercise their holy power with righteousness, compassion, humility, and love. Jesus was commissioned by the Father in this way and so were each of us, baptized and commissioned as ministers of love, peace, and justice. God's new servants receive a holy assignment, to bring light to the nations. Through their Holy Baptism Catherine and Luna are being commissioned by God into Holy service, just like each of us was; then God says to all of us as God said to Jesus, "you are my Beloved, with you I am well pleased."

We are commissioned to serve God in different ways. Let's consider the three kings who were sent to Israel to follow a new light in the skies, they were commissioned to witness the manifestation of God in the newborn Jesus. The story of the three kings is as relevant today as it was then, because their commission, like ours, was to demonstrate that Christ's light is holy and indiscriminate. God chose three kings from foreign lands to find Christ the newborn king; they weren't Jews, they weren't Christians, they were three different foreigners from three different

countries; a revelation that God's purpose in Christ was to open humanity to universal love. That is what the light of Jesus is all about.

Matthew's Epiphany Gospel is fascinating to me, it always takes me back to my childhood when I witnessed my grandfather's commission being played at every feast of the Epiphany as he gave praise and thanksgiving to God through music. His youngest son, my uncle Juan was born prematurely in the early thirties and in his prayers, he implored God to save his life, and my uncle made it. My Abuelo Máximo promised God that he would worship the Lord publicly with live music nonstop for three consecutive days during the feast of the Epiphany. I grew up witnessing the fulfillment of that promise, as my Abuelo honored the light of God in the light of his son. My grandfather wasn't a religious man, but he was a faithful believer who knew that the presence of God had been revealed. I believe that God commissioned him to be a witness of devotion and commitment to the people in his community.

We never know what God will commission us to do in life – that's part of the mystery. These girls who were born with the light of Christ will be guided by their parents, godparents, you, and God knows who else to love, do justice, and continue propagating the story of Jesus Christ to all sorts of people in ways unimaginable. I can't help but wonder who will hear this Holy story from Luna and Catherine. Imagine them in five, ten, twenty or fifty years leading others to the light of Christ, a light that their parents and godparents will be holding up for them today.

I started by naming the celebrations we honor today, the celebrations that brought us in worship this morning. Let's celebrate the baptism of Catherine Jane and Luna Alexandra who we pray, will be wise women, witnesses and testaments of the light and love of Christ in the world. Following their baptism, I will invite everyone to the other magnificent celebration of love in Christ, the Holy Eucharist. I will invite everyone to come to the table of the Lord, please come, just as you are, the way God made you, so that you can be filled with the Holy Spirit through the presence of Jesus in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. We have many reasons to celebrate the presence of Jesus in our lives, thank you for coming to the celebration today! Amen.