

**Sunday, January 9, 2022 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church
Epiphany / Baptism of the Lord Sunday**

**Bible Study – Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
“Well Pleased”**

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes) In groups of two or three, respond to the following, “We see in verse 15 that ‘the people were filled with expectation.’ When was the last time you had exciting news to share? With whom did you share the news?”

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22. Context. In Luke’s Gospel, we move quickly from the account of Jesus’ infancy and his visit to the Temple as a “tween” to the preaching of John the Baptist. Luke gives us a taste of his fiery preaching and his condemnation of sin – but also the ethical teaching he has for those who would like to repent of their sin and to “bear fruits worthy of repentance.” In the opening verses of this week’s reading, the people inquire of John’s relationship to the Messiah and he answers them. Passed over in this week’s reading is the account that Luke gives of John’s arrest by Herod Antipas – before even a reference to Jesus’ baptism. In this way, Luke signals that John’s ministry has ended before the voice from heaven announces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Luke adds the detail that Jesus was praying when he experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit, signaling here the importance of prayer in Luke’s understanding of the Christian life.

Read Luke 3:15-17, 22-22

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the story?

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

Read Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 again.

Some reflection questions – Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- What labels and/or titles have you been given (positive, negative, neutral)?
- A voice from heaven declared Jesus as Beloved. “When I think that being God’s beloved is the core of who I am, it makes me feel...”
 - Blessed
 - Ashamed
 - Guilty
 - Conflicted
 - Speechless
 - Other

- Henri Nouwen wrote, “Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the ‘Beloved.’ Being the Beloved expresses the core truth of our existence.” (Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*.) Do you agree or disagree with Nouwen’s statement? Explain.
- How is John the Baptist a model disciple?
- How does John the Baptist characterize the ministry of the “one coming” after him?
- Why is the phrase “and was praying” (in v. 21) important to what happens in the story? [Shows Jesus’ practice of being in prayer, demonstrates Jesus’ humanity and intimate relationship with the Father and that what happens next is the result of being faithful in baptism and in prayer.]
- What does it mean to be a beloved child of God?
- Option A: If your worship service did not include a “Remembering of Your Baptism” time, share your stories of being baptized. Who was there? How old were you? How meaningful was it for you? For your family? For the church community?
- Option B: If your worship service included a “Remembering of Your Baptism” time, share your experience. How was this meaningful for you? Why is it important to remember your baptism?

Practice: Find a way to remind yourself that you are one of God’s beloved children. This might mean placing a sticky note with the word “beloved” on your bathroom mirror or a wallpaper on your computer or home screen of your cellphone that reminds you that you are beloved of God.

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, pray the closing prayer. Ask for a volunteer to lead the group or read the following prayer in unison:

Faithful God, we can find words of affirmation uncomfortable. Help us to be uncomfortable in hearing your affirmation declared over us and others. Remind us that we are one of the baptized. May our baptisms be a source of affirmation and a call to emulate Jesus by serving others. May others see in us that your love that never ends. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord’s Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.