

**Sunday, January 7, 2024 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church**  
**Bible Study**  
**First Sunday After the Epiphany / Baptism of the Lord**  
**“And There was Morning”**  
**Genesis 1:1-5 and Mark 1:4-11**

Open with a word of prayer

**Gathering Time** (5-10 minutes). Have participants talk about the day of their baptism in pairs or groups of three. Provide the following questions: “Do you remember your baptism? Were you baptized as an infant or an adult? Who baptized you? Who was present? Who was missing?”

**Genesis 1:1-5. Context.** This week’s reading gives us the opening words of the Bible. Along with the rest of the first chapter of Genesis that recounts the first seven “days,” it serves as a prologue to the entire story of the Bible. The general theme of the first chapter is that God brings order out of chaos through divine speech (the “Word”), and the result of the divine activity is good. The “wind from God” in these verses has often been understood as the “Spirit of God” or “Holy Spirit,” the extension of God’s being into the universe.

**Mark 1:4-11 Context.** This week’s reading, an account of the ministry of John the baptizer and the baptism of Jesus, is the beginning of Mark’s gospel. It establishes several points: that John was the “forerunner” of Jesus, announcing his coming; that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit; and that only Jesus saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove, and heard the voice of God proclaim him God’s beloved Son – a proclamation that echoed that of a King (Psalm 2) as well as a Servant (Isaiah 42).

**Read Genesis 1:1-5 and Mark 1:4-11**

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 text?

**Read Genesis 1:1-5 and Mark 1:4-11 again -**

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

- Why is water so significant in the sacrament of baptism?
- *“[John the Baptist was] someone who knew. Someone who had found what he (and they) was looking for. So, John gave it to them with water and with words. They glimpsed it in the gathering of the multitudes. ...That was why they splashed into the river to be baptized by this crazy man. He had something they wanted. He saw what they were*

*looking for.*” Have you found what you were looking for? When did you realize that you had found it? Is there a time when you mistakenly thought you had found what you were looking for?

- Was Jesus’ baptism necessary if he did not need repentance? Is the biblical account of his baptism relevant for us today? Why?
- The author of the preaching notes says that we want certainty that God claimed us, that we are beloved children with whom God is well pleased. Do you have this certainty? If so, how did you gain this certainty?
- Like John the Baptist, how could you lead people to Jesus, our savior? How could you help others gain the certainty that they are beloved children 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, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

God, our Creator, may we always remember that, through our baptism, you claimed us. We are your beautiful and beloved children. Thank you for the gestures of love we receive daily through your creation. Help us share these gestures of love with others.  
**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.