

A new year means new beginnings.

New healthcare cards

New semesters or marking periods

For some, perhaps new homes, new jobs, or new haircuts.

There is the sense of a fresh start, a clean slate, a new canvas on which to paint the next chapter of our lives.

Baptism is such a new start.

And for Jesus, his baptism, which the church celebrates today, was the beginning of his public ministry on earth.

But not only did Jesus' baptism begin a new chapter in his life, it began a new chapter in the life of all humanity.

To speak of all humanity is a big concept. But the apostle Peter puts it concisely in his conversation with Cornelius:

God sent his word to the children of Israel and proclaimed the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of all.

Jesus commanded us to preach to the people and to bear witness that he is the one designated by God as Judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ To him all the Prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name."

Jesus is first the promised Messiah for the Jewish people – the people of God's covenant.

Jesus reconciles them to God and brings them into the New Covenant, the New Testament.

But Jesus is not just a Jewish rabbi for the Jews.

He is the Son of God, the Lord of all.

In this marvelous story in Acts 10, the Holy Spirit brings Peter into contact with Cornelius

– a Roman centurion,

--not a Jew, but a God-fearer, a person who was acquainted with the Greek-speaking Jewish world and adopted some of its beliefs without fully converting to the Jewish faith.

In other words, Cornelius was a Gentile.

He was not a son of the covenant, to use Jewish terms.

He was, for all intents and purposes, an outsider.

But the baptism of Jesus,

- his teaching and healing,
- his death and resurrection,
- his commissioning of the apostles,
- and his ascension to the right hand of God the Father,
- changed everything.

Peter could announce to Cornelius that *everyone who believes in Jesus as Lord receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*

No longer is adherence to the Law of Moses necessary to be right with God – only faith in Jesus as the saving Reconciler.

This encounter between Peter and Cornelius is the beginning of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Christian community, the Way of Jesus;

for what happens next in the story is that the Holy Spirit descends upon Cornelius and his entire household and they are baptized into this reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

Do you see how the dominoes are falling?

- The prophets foretell the coming of Jesus as the one anointed by God to bring peace to his people.
- The angels tell it to the shepherds in the Judean countryside.
- The shepherds tell it to Mary and Joseph about their newborn Son.
- John the Baptist prepares the whole Jewish community for the fulfillment of God's promises in the Messiah.
- God the Father publicly identifies Jesus as his Son, the one anointed by God to save people;
- Jesus gives himself over to death for the sins of all people and is raised from the dead to begin eternal life for the human race.
- Jesus trains and sends apostles into the world to share this word of peace and hope and to make followers who will continue to spread this good news.
- Peter is sent to Cornelius and his household, and soon many Gentiles as well as Jews are being baptized into the Way of Jesus.

And so it continues to this day, as you and I were baptized,
and God continues to draw people who come to believe in Jesus
into this faith.

The Baptism of Jesus,

in which the Holy Spirit of God anointed him
and God the Father called him Son,

**is the foundation of birth into Christian faith by baptism in
the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

Most of us who are baptized were baptized as infants
– God chose us while we could not yet speak to receive
forgiveness and life in Jesus Christ.

We have been raised in the Way of Jesus and

- taught to pray,
- to hear God's Word in the Bible,
- to know the story of God's love for us.

But, as with Cornelius and his household, the Church baptizes people of every age – babies, children, teenagers, young adults, middle-aged adults, senior citizens, and even the very old.

Because, as Peter said, *everyone who believes in Jesus as Lord receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*

There is no time limit.

And there is no time like now to enjoy the forgiveness of sins and new life that baptism into Jesus gives.

It is a new beginning.

Earthly relationships can sometimes be disappointing – As Psalm 27 says: *Even If my father and mother leave me, the LORD will take me in.*

The Lord takes us in by our baptism so that we might also tell others the good news of peace in Jesus Christ.

For Jesus is the one of whom the Father said, *“This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well-pleased.”*

To follow Jesus is our delight, for he is the Way and the Truth and the Life who gives us access to God.

No longer are we separated from God by our sins. Jesus has made our peace with God.

So, dear people of God, what will you do with your clean slate?

In the name...