

**“YOU ARE MY SON, THE BELOVED;
WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED!”**

The First Sunday after the Epiphany
January 10, 2010
Year C, Epiphany 1
Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22
The Rev. Hugh E. Brown, III, D. Min.

“You are my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased!”

There is another way to translate the phrase, “with you I am well pleased.”

The Catholic version states, “Today I have begotten you.”

Over the past few weeks of Christmastide, we hear the biblical claim that Jesus was begotten as a human creature in the womb of Mary and born as a fully human being.

In story of Jesus’ Baptism, we learn that God begot him a second time, in a different way—spiritually, by revealing to him his spiritual mission.

Now, even if we cling to the orthodox understanding that Jesus had a spiritual mission before the beginning of time, the story of his Baptism reveals an important existential truth, that we often need a spiritual name, as well as a human name.

Names matter.

Perhaps that is why Jesus came to John—something about naming. Perhaps he did not know why he was there. Perhaps he was simply drawn to John’s charismatic teaching and his rite of Baptism and he accepted and embraced both. Perhaps he was simply obedient to the movement of the spirit as he experienced it.

He did not know where he was being led but he knew he needed to figure out a deeper dimension to his life.

He needed to discover his true Name. By searching and seeking, he found it.

Monday after next, we celebrate the National Holiday for Martin Luther King, Jr. According to David J. Garrow, in his work, *Bearing the Cross*, Martin

King began to sense a call to the ministry at an early age; he truly felt he was marked by God for a special vocation. Unfortunately, at the same time, he received a simultaneous message that he was inferior.

He gives a riveting tale of an invitation to give an address on American history at a Georgia State gathering, attempting to use the restroom in the building and having his arm yanked by a white teacher and pulled into the restroom marked for African-Americans. He cried off and on for days after this.

But he would not give up on his perceived mission and started to follow his father, a noted Atlanta clergyman, after school on his ministerial duties. He did not know why he was doing thus—just felt he needed to be obedient.

One day, his Dad was stopped and pulled over by a white police officer, when racial profiling in the south was just a way of life. The officer demanded of his father, “Boy get out of the Car.” His father stoically looked at the officer, stayed put, pointed to his son, and said, “That is a boy and a beautiful boy.”

“I’m a man. I’m your equal in every way. I’m Rev. King of Ebenezer Baptist Church of Atlanta; you might know that name; it is pretty well known with City Council circles—the group that funds your salary!”

After a period of more than awkward silence, the police officer, without apology, simply let the Rev. and his son go.

“Never forget who you are son,” Martin Luther King Sr., told his preacher son to be. “Above all you are beloved. You are a child of God. You are anyone’s equal.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. said he knew his name for the first time that day. It was alike a second Baptism.

In a few minutes, Jack Bruno will receive the sacrament of Baptism and

receive a spiritual name, beloved child of God. We will hear some of the most beautiful words in the Book of Common Prayer of the Anglican tradition: "You are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever."

We need to be careful here; Jack has always been a Beloved child of God. Jesus was a beloved child of God from the beginning of creation. Jack does not need, and will never need a second Baptism.

But today, Jack begins his journey, under the guidance of his parents and loved ones, to discovering what it means to be a beloved Child of God.

It will be a life-long journey. It will require, like Jesus, constantly discovering what it means to be God's beloved.

But, like Dr. King, Jack will hear his name in a different way today; yes, he is a boy. But he is a beautiful boy. He is also anyone's equal. He is a gifted, loved young man. God has rich and beautiful and miraculous wonders in mind for him, as he does for all his children.

But we don't stop there; Jesus, in continually discovering his own nature as Beloved, offered that gift to others as his very identity and vocation.

He continually gave to hers the new birth of discovering their name as children of God, as Beloved—as Begotten of God.

To all who simply had birth names, Jesus bestowed, through his breath, touch and love, the true name as only God can give and those in the spirit of God can here—Beloved, child of God—beautiful and good.

Are we all sinners, broken and imperfect? Yes. Does God see beyond the sin and treat us as only God can see us, touch us, hear us? Yes. As the Presbyterian theologian and spiritual writer, Frederick Buechner once wrote, all the sin in the world, if put in a cup, compared to God's love would only be a

drop. Love would overflow as water in an ever-running stream.

Now is this the world as it can be, as opposed to the world as it is? Yes. Is this kind of world possible? It is not only possible; it is an impossible, possibility.

And it happens whenever we live with the experience of a Dad affirming God's truth, "I'm Rev. King and 'son' you are Beloved!"

A spiritual writer and southern pastor, Janet Wolf, who served for many years of the great social outreach/witness parish of Hobson United Methodist Church in Nashville, TN, a diverse parish transcending class, race, gender, economic status and culture, tells the story of Fayette.

Fayette suffered from severe mental disability, lupus and homelessness. Yet she found a home at Hobson. She joined the new member class and wanted to be baptized.

Baptism gripped her imagination. She kept on asking, "And when I'm Baptized, I am, I am....?" The class, as a ritual, ceremony and mantra, exclaimed, "Beloved, previous Child of God."

The day of Fayette's Baptism came. Fayette went under the water (this is a church of full immersion Baptism!) and came up, crying, "And now I am." All the class with her stood up in the pews in response, "Beloved, precious child of God." And she danced around the sanctuary, shouting beloved, precious and no one was uncomfortable—in tears, silence and solidarity, they were all celebrating with her.

Two months later, Janet received a telephone call; she was on the street sleeping one night and she was beaten and assaulted. Janet immediately went to the hospital to see her.

Janet relates what happened next, "She turned, ran to me, hair sticking up, blood and tears on her face, dress torn, dirty, collapsed in my arms and said

softly, "Beloved child of God, beloved child of God." She looked in a mirror and declared: 'God is still working on me. If you come back tomorrow, I'll be so beautiful, I'll take your breath away.' I did and she was."

Jack's Baptism today is not just for him, anymore than our Baptism is for just you and me.

Baptism is for a new world, reordered into God's world; Baptism is our call to participate in the life of a Fayette, beaten by the world, but faith untouched by cruelty and evil, because, somehow, through Jack, or you or me, she received her name—Beloved.

Yes, we indeed know the truth and reality of Baptism when Beloved becomes the truth of the world, and when All can say, "God is still working on me—come back tomorrow and I'll take your breath away."

Or, a little boy hears the words, "I'm Rev. King—and discovers he is within the Kingship and Reign of Jesus.

Amen.