

**The Baptism of Our Lord**  
**January 12-13, 2013**  
**Luke 3:15-22**

***“Who is My Neighbor? – Baptized into the Serving Community”***

One of the most quoted persons of recent times is not a world leader, human rights advocate, or religious figure, but the late baseball player and manager, Yogi Berra. Without intending to be funny, his off-the-cuff comments have found their way into the fabric of American life. Here’s just a few: “When you come to a fork in the road, take it.” “The future ain’t what it used to be.” “You can observe a lot by watching.” “It ain’t over til it’s over.” “It gets late early out here.” “Never answer an anonymous letter.” And my personal favorite: “It’s déjà vu all over again” (see <http://www.yogiberra.com/yogi-isms.html>). Today’s Gospel lesson may seem like “it’s déjà vu all over again.” Didn’t we just hear this about a month ago in Advent? And that would be correct. We did hear about John the Baptist who called the people to repentance before the coming of the promised Messiah. That Advent Gospel lesson is expanded today to include the baptism of that Messiah, Jesus: “... **the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased’**” (Luke 3:21-22). Jesus’ baptism identifies him as the Father’s chosen and anointed Son and marks the beginning of his public ministry. Today we celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord, and give thanks for Jesus’ baptism by John in the Jordan River. Today we also celebrate and give thanks for our own Baptism that joins us to Jesus’ saving work, marking us as God’s beloved sons and daughters. Today we also begin our 5-week series of **Being SJLC 2013 – Serving Jesus + Living in Community**. Over these five weeks, we will be focusing on the question: “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29), and so the message for this day is entitled: “Who is My Neighbor? – Baptized into the Serving Community.” May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

If you’ve ever watched “Sesame Street” on TV as a kid or with your kids, then you’ve heard this song: “Who are the people in your neighborhood, the people that you meet each day?” This gets at what **Being SJLC 2013** is all about. Remember **Being SJLC** from Epiphany last year? Through worship and preaching, Bible study, fellowship and servant opportunities, we were challenged to put into practice the faith we profess and live as Christ’s servants in daily life – not just here at church, but in the places where we spend most of our time. Our new Southeastern District President, Dr. John Denninger, is calling the congregations and people of our district to ask the question, “Who is my neighbor,” and start thinking of our own neighborhoods as our personal mission field. We have two goals for **Being SJLC 2013**: 1) that each one of us be renewed and transformed in faith through this focus, and 2) that each one of us see our neighborhoods through baptized, mission eyes. Our neighborhoods certainly include where we live, but by extension can also be our places of work, the school, the gym, the coffee shop – wherever we are, that is our mission field. Our mission calling is at the same time a global and a local calling. If we put those two words “global” and “local” together we get a new word: “glocal.” And so our neighborhood is what Jesus described in his parting words to his disciples before his ascension: “**And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth**” (Acts 1:8). Think of this as concentric and ever-widening circles. Our Jerusalem is here in the local congregation at St. John’s. Our Judea is where we live, the neighborhood around us. Our Samaria is beyond that – places of need in our

broken world like post-Hurricane Sandy. The ends of the earth is beyond that – places like Haiti where St. John's Servant Team is headed next Saturday. Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan moved him into the calling of his public ministry, which would take him from Jordan to Jerusalem where He would suffer and die upon the cross, rising in triumph over sin, death and hell. Our Baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection clothes us with the spotless garment of Christ's own righteousness and moves us out into our calling as servants of Jesus and of one another.

In today's Epistle lesson (Romans 6:1-11), Paul talks about what being baptized into the serving community looks like. Our old sinful self was drowned and died in the cleansing waters of holy Baptism when we were sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. Our Baptism has given us a new identity and a new purpose: **"... just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life"** (Romans 6:4). Walking means movement; we can't just sit on this "good news of great joy that is for all people" (Luke 2:10). Our Baptismal identity and purpose as Christ's people moves us out into our neighborhoods – where the needs are and where the hurts are. The serving community into which we're baptized here is where we find strength and encouragement. As we gather around Word and Sacrament here in the fellowship of believers, we are built up in our faith toward God and in our love toward one another. But if there is a gathering, there must also be a sending. I heard a commencement speaker once say to the graduating class: "To leave this place is sad, but to remain in this place would be tragic." So also here in the church! God calls us to take this good news out into the world around us; out into our neighborhoods. Like our congregational mission statement says: "We gather around the cross where we are formed and fueled by God's grace, and are then sent into the world to invite all people to a life transformed by Jesus Christ."

Our baptismal calling to carry the good news of great joy out into our neighborhoods, to recognize Christ in our neighbor and be Christ to our neighbor, can be tough stuff. We will encounter obstacles and opposition that stand in the way. We will find all sorts of excuses why we can't reach out to our neighbor. We may become discouraged along the way because we don't see things changing. We may wonder if it's all worth it. Hear again God's gracious words in today's Old Testament lesson (Isaiah 43:1-7): **"But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.'"** Dear baptized people of Christ and members of St. John's: this is our joy and our strength as we go out into our neighborhoods with the good news of Jesus: we do not go alone. The Lord himself who loves us and gave himself for us goes with us – beside us, before and behind us, above us and beneath us. And so let us walk in that newness of life. Amen.