

**The Baptism of the Lord
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There is something odd about the church's liturgical calendar. The baby Jesus grows up very quickly. Just last week the tiny baby still dressed in his swaddling clothes was greeted by foreign Magi. Today he is an adult making his first great public decision and setting forth on his life's vocation. Don't you wish your own adolescence and early adult years passed that quickly and without notice?

But, of course, this is liturgical time. One thing we can be sure of, is that the lived experience didn't happen that quickly or that quietly. But the only clue we get in the gospel accounts is that after his adolescent visit to the temple, Jesus retired from public view and "grew in wisdom, age, and grace" before God and others. But, as the famous phrase says, "like us in all things save sin," the lived experience of those quiet years was probably the most important formative influence in his life.

During these years Jesus learned who he was and who he wanted to become. During these years, like us in all things, he tested himself against his dreams; he molded himself in light of his God's promise; he fashioned his own dream listening, perhaps, to the very same reading from Isaiah we heard

today. It was a dream wherein all who were thirsty drank fully, and even those who had no money, ate their full without paying and without cost. It was a dream fashioned on God's Promise and God's Word: "so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; my word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will." And Jesus trusted that Word. Or, as John says so bluntly, Jesus *was* that Word.

Jesus learned from his human experience to trust his very special relationship with his God, Abba. And I think of a once famous quip by Oscar Wilde: "experience is simply the name we give to our mistakes." Surely, like all of us, Jesus made mistakes in these quiet years. Mistakes shape dreams—all dreams. But there is no mistake when he appears for his baptism in the Jordan.

This baptism scene is recorded in all four gospels as the launching of his public ministry. It is certainly a historical moment in Jesus' life and a moment of great significance for him and for all of us. It is no accident; it is a moment he must have waited for and planned. In Mark's account (read today), only the barest outlines are offered. He comes to the water like the multitudes of others waiting there for John's attention. He is baptized by John. And then he, and he alone in Mark's gospel, sees the heavens rent, sees

the dove, and hears the words: “You are my chosen servant (an alternate and perhaps more accurate translation for you are my beloved Son).

Jesus hears God’s choice, God’s decision for his life at this moment.

Jesus makes his own decision, his own choice at this moment. And he never turns back. The baptism is the third great revelation of Christmas.

Shepherds are stunned by angels at his physical birth; Magi wander from a far to give thanks for the light to all peoples at Epiphany. And the Baptism concludes the Christmas season with yet an even more blunt revelation: God’s choice, God’s decision is to share God’s life so intimately. God’s Spirit hovers again over the waters (Genesis) and says the most astounding Yes to creation. And Jesus, standing in the muddy waters of the Jordan, hearing God’s desire to share God’s life, says Yes to *being* Emmanuel, God with us.

The great novelist Iris Murdoch once said: “The world can change in 15 seconds, when you fall in love.” Jesus’ baptism may not have taken much longer than 15 seconds. But he fell in love again in that moment and the rest is history.

Baptisms are always about choices, about decisions. Even if you were a baby being baptized, your parents and godparents voiced a choice for you in faith. We are all baptized as we sit here today. We, too, made a decision once.

**And we are still invited to choose to live that choice everyday. And so another
Christmas season ends—with a new beginning.**