

From Pastor Marissa Becklin

Baptism Of Our Lord

In 2018 I had the joy of spending the feast day of the Baptism Of Our Lord in Greece, on the island of Santorini in the Aegean Sea. This small little island is pretty isolated from the rest of the world, and it was a sunny day—a day when even off you squinted at the horizon, you could only just begin to make out the outlines of other islands nearby. Santorini is secluded and quiet.

We had heard that this day was a big deal in the Greek Orthodox Church—we knew that an exciting celebration would be taking place, and we wanted to get a chance to witness it. So as morning broke, we made our way down the side of the caldera—the steep cliff on the side of the island that juts into the sea—and we waited. We waited surrounded by others, who were also waiting—crowds and crowds of people from the community who wanted to be a part of what would take place. As we sat on the edge of this water that eventually becomes one with ocean water and thus connected us in that moment to the rest of the whole world, we kept our eyes on the tiny little whitewashed church down the road.

At the top of the hour the doors of the church flew open, the sound of bells ringing hit our ears, and a procession began—the priest led the whole congregation to the edge of the water as they sang hymns about God's love for us and for our world. The joy in the air was palpable—God had revealed God's whole heart to us on this day, they sang, and now we knew that we, like Jesus, had been called beloved. What more could we want?

The crowd parted for the priest, and as he positioned himself at the edge of the sea, he began to sing a blessing. This blessing was for us, the people gathered, who were loved deeply by God, but this blessing was also (and more specifically) for the body of water that we stood in front of. As he held a cross up in the air, he sang about how the fact that God had become a human—had become one of us—meant that the blessing poured out on Jesus in his baptism had now broken out into the world, had cloaked all of us and creation, and had begun the work of redeeming the world. When Jesus was baptized and had the Spirit poured out on him, this priest sang, the hope of creation being made whole had become a reality. Because Jesus was baptized in the waters of this earth, God's project of reaching into our world and making all things new had begun. The priest's blessing ended with the tossing of the cross into the sea, blessing that body of water in front of us and thus the whole world. I thought about the waves that would carry those words of love and hope throughout the oceans of our world, of that very blessing washing up on the shores of South Africa, Hong Kong, Belize, California, Australia. Santorini was an isolated place, yes, but on that day we were reminded of how even in the midst of feeling isolated, we were very much connected to the rest of the world (and to God).

There's a tradition that when the cross is tossed into the sea to bless the waters, the first man to jump in and find the cross receives a blessing for his household. It's a fun and cold thing to watch, but the good news of this day is more abundant: in our baptism, we have *all* received the blessing of Christ. We can all move through life in the confidence that we have been wrapped in Christ's grace and love, with the sure promise of forgiveness belonging to us.

Blessed Baptism Of Our Lord, and Blessed Epiphany.

Peace,

Pastor Marissa Becklin †

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