



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Baptism of Our Lord (A) – Acts 10:34-43

Focus: *The Good News is For All!*

word of life

“...I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” Acts 10:34-35 (NRSV)

Read Acts 10:34-43

This Sunday is the celebration of the Baptism of Our Lord. The celebration falls in the church calendar in the season of the Epiphany. The themes of this season emphasize the ways in which the Good News of Jesus is revealed to all nations and all peoples.

This good news seems obvious today. The early church, however, wrestled with the inclusive scope of the Christian message. Up to this point in Acts, those who had been baptized and had received the gift of the Holy Spirit had been Jews or Samaritans. Gentiles were not included in the church. There were some who believed that those who converted to Christianity had to follow Jewish law before being accepted into the Christian community.

1. *What expectations are there today for those who convert and become Christian?*

It is in this struggle that we find Peter in the lesson for today. The context is critical for us to fully understand the importance of these verses. In Acts 10, Peter came to the astonishing realization that the good news of salvation through Jesus was for Gentiles as well. Cornelius—a centurion, a member of the Roman military, a Gentile—had a vision. An angel of the Lord instructed Cornelius in this vision to send messengers to invite Peter to come to his home. Before the messengers arrived at Peter’s home, Peter also had a vision of a sheet filled with animals—both clean and unclean. In the vision, Peter is commanded to eat, both the clean and unclean. When he protested eating that which was considered unclean, a voice in the vision said to Peter, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” (Acts 10:15 NRSV) Peter was perplexed about the meaning of the vision, and then the messengers from Cornelius arrived.

It all began to make sense to Peter—the vision, the animals, the voice. It was an Epiphany “aha” moment. Peter crossed the boundary of clean and unclean, of Jew and Gentile. He went to Cornelius’ home, even though it was unlawful for a Jew to associate with a Gentile, and spoke these profound words: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” (Acts 10:34-35 NRSV)

2. *What does it mean that God shows no partiality?*
3. *Describe an “aha” Epiphany moment in your life of faith.*

Peter then told the story of Jesus. He told of Jesus’ ministry and message. He recalled how Jesus was baptized by John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit. He proclaimed Jesus’ healing deeds and power. And, in a bold statement reflecting a new insight, Peter said that everyone who believes in Jesus – both Jew and Gentile, clean and unclean—is included and receives forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name.

4. *What do you guess the reaction to that news might have been?*
5. *Are there still walls which divide Christians? Explain. How do we move beyond the walls?*

The meaning of the visions of Cornelius and Peter became clear. Cornelius and on all those gathered in his house were moved by the Holy Spirit to speak in tongues and extol God. The Spirit moved Peter to announce, “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” (Acts 10:47 NRSV) The good news of Jesus is for all!

word among us

He drew a circle that shut me out - Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win: We drew a circle and took him in!
(From the poem "Outwitted" by Edwin Markham)

We too often gather in like-minded groups. We too often have lists of requirements that must be met before accepting others. We too often make prejudgments (note the word "prejudice") about others, especially those who differ from us.

1. *How does your congregation invite and include those who are different?*
2. *What extra steps have been taken at your church to provide hospitality for guests who come to worship and study with you?*

The good news—the Gospel message—is heard in the opening words of Peter's sermon to those gathered in Cornelius' home: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him." (Acts 10:34-35 NRSV) The implications are clear: if God shows no partiality, then neither does God's community. The dividing lines separating Jews and Gentiles have been washed away.

We can't fully grasp the significance of Peter's insight for the early church. Nor can we grasp its significance for the church today. The inclusive universality of the message of Jesus empowered the apostle Paul to go to Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, and even to Rome to share the good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It empowered Peter to proclaim to the Gentiles assembled at Cornelius' house, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47 NRSV) And it empowered the saving message of Jesus to be proclaimed through our ancestors to each of us.

3. *Put into words the significance of Peter's insight for the early church.*
4. *How did this insight help to open the door for non-Jews to become Christian?*
5. *How does this insight open doors for you to be included in the community of faith?*

faith practice in daily life

Serve all people, following the example of Jesus Christ

Today, on this celebration of the baptism of our Lord, we reflect on the inclusive nature of our baptism and our calling. Through word and water, we are united with Christ and with all who have been baptized. The Epiphany message rings loud and clear: Jesus is for all! Christ, given and shed—for you! Christ, crucified—for you! Christ, risen—for you!

We are called in baptism to announce this wondrous news to all the world, and to serve all people, for all are included!

6. *What are some examples of ways all are included in your congregation?*
7. *How does this good news impact how we relate to those who are different from us?*

Prayer

Gracious God, we give you thanks that you include all of us in your saving grace. Help us to be inclusive of others as we live out our faith. Amen

last word

Watch for opportunities in your congregation to include all.