

## **Epiphany 1 - The Baptism of our Lord - January 10, 2010**

**The Very Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder**

“Lord, take my lips and speak through them; take my mind and think through it; take my heart and set it on fire for your Holy Gospel.” +Amen

Thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, 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...when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned... (Isaiah 43) The prophet Isaiah proclaimed that we do not choose God—God chooses us. God forms us, God takes us by the hand, and God keeps us in the best sense of that image. God chooses to be in relationship with us.

Louise Haskins wrote: And I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the year, ‘Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.’ And he replied, ‘Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than the known way.’ What is true about our lives is that there is always more unknown than known. We know that events of our lives and events of the world can be quite difficult and painful to grasp at times, yet the hope of a life-giving God continues. We hear on Christmas Day about a 23 year-old Nigerian radical Muslim with explosives in his underwear who attempts to bring down a passenger plane over Detroit and take hundreds of lives, yet the hope of God continues. We may have received news that our position is being terminated due to budget cuts, yet the hope of God continues. We are told that the biopsy shows a malignancy, yet the hope of God continues.

This hope was that which had entered the world through the Incarnation—the birth of Jesus Christ, was visited by the Magi, and was further proclaimed when God called down from heaven at Christ’s baptism, You are my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased. (Matthew 3)

And this is the same hope that we celebrate today at Trinity Cathedral through the Holy Baptism of these beautiful children. Today God both visually and deeply within our souls reminds us that God is the One that takes us by the hand, as we pour water over their heads and proclaim

them to have new life in the kingdom of God, “Marked as Christ’s own forever!” The ongoing presence, hope, and work of God continue through His children, Church, and the world.

When you have had difficulties, change, or loss in your life, have you experienced what Isaiah meant by God taking us by the hand? The answer is not always a simple one—sometimes we feel God’s presence, and at others times we may experience isolation, questioning, and the apparent absence of God. Those are the times when a kind word, a pat on the back, or a quote from scripture simply doesn’t cut it. Instead we need to feel the squeeze of God’s hand. All God asks of us is that we hold out our open hand in that darkness, the rest we must leave to God.

Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his book, “God Has a Dream,” writes: If you were in heaven now you would notice the tears in God’s eyes. The tears streaming down God’s face as God looked on us and saw the awful things that we, God’s children, are doing to each other. God cries and cries. And then you might see the smile that is breaking over God’s face like sunshine through the rain, almost like a rainbow. You would see God smiling because God was looking on you and noting how deeply concerned you are. (P127-128)

The God that Isaiah proclaimed, is the same God that called down from heaven at his Son’s baptism. It is the same God today that brings these children through the waters of Holy Baptism into new life as Christians in the Kingdom of God. And it is the same God that in the uncertain and difficult times of your life asks you only to reach out for God’s hand, even when you cannot feel God’s grasp and presence. God is always, always with you—God notices how deeply concerned you are. +AMEN.