

Greetings members and friends of the First Congregational Church of Shelburne,

It is with sadness that we witnessed the unthought of, unexpected, and unimaginable ransacking of our nation's capital building even as Congress was in session. The magnitude of this event is beyond the images that have come out of Washington DC. To have citizens forcefully and violently break into the seat of our democracy and believe they are doing the right thing should give every citizen pause to reflect on how this has come about.

Today, I would request prayers for all in our nation's capital, especially for the five families who now grieve the loss of a loved one due to this tragedy. Let us also pray for a year of reconciliation and reunification in our nation.

It appears ironic that this Sunday is the first Sunday after Epiphany (January 6) bringing a close on Christmas Tide. I have every reason to believe that while we may remember Christmases of our past, we do not recall too many, if any, Epiphanies. Except this one.

The service and video for this week was created before the events of this past Wednesday. The text for this Sunday is Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan. Perhaps we can find a renewed hope in this story of rebirth.

Wishing you God's peace,

Pastor Rob

Welcome to Sunday Worship
January 10, 2021

Good Morning to our members and friends at home,

This Sunday marks the first one after Epiphany and the close of Christmas Tide. Customary readings for this Sunday include the baptism of Jesus by John in the River Jordan. Today we will be exploring the account of this event from the Gospel according to Matthew.

Prayer Requests: We are accepting requests for prayer (healing, comfort, thanksgiving, and others). Please send your requests to the Pastor at pastor01089@gmail.com. Requests will then be sent out through our email list to the congregation for our common prayer life during the week. PLEASE remember that all prayer requests received become public knowledge. If you are uncertain if your request for another might be confidential, do not send it.

And now let us be in worship

Morning Unison Prayer & the Lord's Prayer

Loving God help us to know that, as your people working together, we can make a difference in our world. That we might lift the fallen, comfort those in sorrow, and seek the lost and lonely, knowing that those who have lost their way, are precious in your eyes. We offer this our prayer in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray saying...*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

Prayers of the People

Our prayers today focus on Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us. There will be an opportunity for you to offer your own prayers and meditate. Let us now come to God in prayer.

O Come to us, Emmanuel, we, your people long to hear your voice. Come to us in the morning, fresh and new, even when we feel old and worn. Come to us and quicken our hearts, though they be heavy laden and heavily fortified. Come to us and inspire us to make a joyful noise, to sing a new song, to rejoice in your new creation. Come to us, Emmanuel, as you have come to any and to all who yearn for you.

You are with us, Emmanuel, Word that became flesh and blood, who dwelt among us in truth and in grace. You are with us, in the waters of baptism, in the covenant of your table sealed in the bread and the cup, from the heights of the mountain tops of this life, to the valleys of sorrow and despair, you have walked and tasted our life. You are with us, and you walk with any and with all who reach out for your guiding hand.

Rejoice! Before you, we rejoice! Emmanuel, God with us. As you come to us, may we go to others, as you walk with us, may we walk with others, the poor and them that mourn, the faint and overborne, sin sick and sorrow worn that they too will discover you, with them and be healed by you.

You, Lord of Hosts, who has done this, you, who have come to us, you, who are with us, Emmanuel, you, who walk with us every day of the earthly existence, you, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, hear our prayers, as they rise before you as incense.....(silent prayer and meditation).

In our prayers we come to you, Oh God, and we offer our prayers in the name of the one you have sent, Emmanuel, God with us. Amen

Scripture Reading: Matthew 3:13-17

All four Gospels record the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the river Jordan. The Gospel according to Matthew brings to us an account of the emergence of Jesus at the River signaling that the time of preparation for the coming of the Messiah is completed.

Then, Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, *“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”*

But Jesus answered him, *“Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.”*

Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said,

“This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

After the reading, you may reflect on this passage and share your thoughts.

There is a set of notes concerning this text for your reflection.
The sermon for this text may be seen in this week's video.

Benediction:

And now, O Lord,
May these thy servants depart in peace,
having seen thy salvation that thou hast prepared
before all people.

And may thy blessings be upon us, both now and forever more,

Notes on the text

The story of Jesus being baptized in the Jordan is a familiar one for Christians. We can see this scene from many angles. One perspective concerns expectations. Somewhere in the mid 1970s, I went to a concert at the Civic Center in Minneapolis Minnesota. The featured musician? Dan Fogelberg. He had a wonderful voice, a great band, and any number of hits. My seat was in the first level off the floor and when the lights dimmed the crowd was on its feet. Everyone was clapping and cheering, and then the spotlights hit the stage. There he was! One man. One guitar. One chair and one microphone. That was it. I sat down with a heavy sigh. I had come to see Dan and the band. I had expected to hear the drums, the guitars, the bass, the vocals, and all there was on stage was one man, one guitar, one chair, and one microphone. When John the Baptist knew that Jesus was coming to town, he took to the streets with a vengeance. *Repent!* he cried. *The kingdom of heaven is at hand!* John proclaimed. And he meant it. People flocked to the River Jordan to confess and be baptized. They wanted to be prepared for the one, the only, the Messiah! And then, the lights dimmed, the crowds roared. Everyone was clapping and cheering! And then spot-lights hit the riverbank and there he was! One man with a robe and sandals. That was it. No halo. No heavenly host No entourage. Just one man. One man looking to be baptized in the River Jordan with every other tax collector, hooker and sinner in town. Not exactly what the prophets had foretold. Not the messiah everyone was hoping for. This one man was not exactly what John expected either. *What do you mean?* John says, *you want to be baptized? Haven't you been listening? Repent! I have been saying, repent because you are coming! How can you repent to prepare for the coming of yourself?* But Jesus is adamant. I confess I feel sorry for John at the Jordan. He's been working the crowds, day and night. Baptizing in the waters of the Jordan. He's all geared up for the show, and then, it's one man. One man who wants to be baptized in the river. That's it. On this level we are introduced to Jesus of Nazareth as God incarnate. It's not enough to tell people the story It's not enough to make the story happen. The word of God incarnate lives the story. Becomes the story. There he is! Standing humbly at the river Jordan to be baptized with every hooker, tax collector and sinner in town simply because he must identify with the very people he has come to save. As the hymn says, "*the poor and them that mourn, the faint and overborne, sin sick and sorrow worn, whom Christ doth heal.*" At the river Jordan, Jesus begins the story of Emmanuel. Jesus is not just God. He is God with us. Some might think this is a fine distinction to make, but others know it is not. In one seminary class a student entered into a conversation concerning the purpose of Christian preaching. *I'm actually a pastor,* he began. *I'm here to finish my degree. When I started preaching, I was convinced the message the people needed to hear was simply God loves you. I preached that almost every Sunday. In some way, the message was: God loves you. And then one day, I got a call to go to the hospital. It was my eight-year-old daughter. She had been riding her bike*

and been hit by a car. She was in the ICU with her mother. When I got to the hospital, I was beside myself. How could this happen? My little girl. How could God let this happen? And I found myself thinking: what kind of love is this? and then I was in her room. I sat down beside her, took her hand in mine, and said the words every father says, "It's okay, Daddy's here. I love you." and she looked at me, and smiled and said, "I know," after a little while, I started to stand up, and her hand tightened around mine. "stay with me," she whispered. I sat back down. And that's what I think the people need to hear. Yes, God is great, and God is good. Yes, Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. Yes, someday the Kingdom of God will come about. Swords into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, and yes, God loves you. More importantly, this pastor concluded, God will stay with you. God will walk with you. God will be with you. And that's how the story begins, Emmanuel, God with us. It is a new year, 2021. Roughly 2000 and 14 years since the story began. The opportunity presents itself for a new beginning with Jesus. One man at the Jordan being baptized with every hooker, tax collector and sinner in town. Emmanuel. God with us. God with you. Amen.