



**A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan
by The Reverend Andrew Van Culin, Rector**

**The First Sunday after The Epiphany
7 January, 2024**

In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Friends, on Sundays of the baptism, particularly on this Sunday, of course, it's natural for us to focus on the baptism of Christ, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, that Jesus, that John points to in Jesus and that Jesus with which we are baptized ourselves. But it's equally valuable for us to remember that there are two baptisms that we've heard about today. There is the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus, and to understand the one that is the baptism of Jesus, it bears, it helps us to remember the baptism of John. John is at the Jordan's edge, baptizing all who come out to him with a baptism of repentance. A few weeks ago, Lisa Brown, our associate for Children, Youth and Family Ministries, reminded us that this baptism, the baptism of repentance is about the transformation of our heart and mind. It is about us as individuals changing the way we live. It's important for us to remember that in baptism, while God is the active one, bestowing upon us, the gift of the Spirit filling us with grace and redemption, that we still have a part to play, that ours is the role of repentance, of turning our heart and our mind in a new direction.

That direction, of course, that John invites us to is the direction of Christ. If we were to use it literally as direction, we would say we would turn and face the altar. We would face the Eucharist. We would face into Christ himself and all that He comes and means for us in order that our life might take on the shape of Christ's life for the world. And what is that shape and what is that life? Christ, you see, sees the world and his neighbor in an entirely different way, then did the First Century, Palestine, then does 21st century Michigan, United States, Earth.



You see, Jesus sees the world as gift first and foremost, that all that come to him are a gift to him, not simply a consumer or a transactional partner, but rather a fundamental gift to him. He sees to the world his neighbor, not as a stranger, but as a sister and brother, and as he eventually calls his disciples even a friend. This way of seeing the world is so fundamentally different than the way we tend to see the world in one another. We tend to look at the world. We tend to look at one another, either as transactional partners, people that can give us something in return for something that we have always an exchange for our benefit, seldom as a gift for our receiving or a gift for our giving. Yet this is the way Jesus himself enters into the world. It is the way that Jesus enters into our community. Even this day, we will celebrate the Eucharist. We will come to the altar or come to the Eucharist with hands out stretch to receive a gift. The gift of Christ's presence among us to be baptized, to choose, to be baptized, to turn, to set our mind on the heart and mind of Christ, is to enter into a life of gift for one another. To think of ourselves as gift givers.

I'm going through our lessons. It was our lesson at morning prayer this past week where we were reminded of that wonderful scene in which Jesus is meeting a man who is born blind, and his disciples ask him, Jesus, why is this man born blind? Was it that his parents sinned or that he sinned? And Jesus responds neither he was born blind, that the glory of God might be revealed in him. That this individual presents him an opportunity to bestow him with a gift. In this case, the gift of healing. Each person that we come encounter, we encounter, each person that we come into relationship with, with presents us an opportunity to bestow them with a gift, the gift that we uniquely possess at that time. And for that person, Jesus sees the world in a different way, and we're invited to enter into the world as he sees it, as gift givers and recipients of the gift of others. May we be so blessed as to live the baptized life of Christ. Amen.