

Advent Lutheran Church
Living Wet
January 12, 2025
Luke 3:1-22

Last week we started a new year with a new practice: star words. Everyone was invited to choose a star and to be guided by the word on that star for the year ahead.

The magi had not expected a star, but found it essential for navigating their way to Jesus. Many of you had not come expecting a star, but received one with gratitude, opening yourself to imagine how a star might inform your journey.

As your pastor, I knew that there were 120 unique words available. I'm grateful to Jeannie for selecting the words, writing them on the stars, and laying the stars out on tables. And I want you all to know I chose the star labeled with the word believe.

Believe . . . Siblings in Christ, belief is a good word to guide people of faith. And, as your pastor I've accepted it as a word not only to direct my path in the year ahead but also to inform our shared experiences.

Today is Baptism of our Lord Sunday. It is a Sunday when we remember Jesus' baptism and also reconnect with our own baptismal story. And, it is also a Sunday when we think about what we believe about baptism and living wet.

Today is also a new beginning. It's the first Sunday of 2025 when nearly everyone is back in worship. And it is the first message in a sermon series called "Meeting Jesus Again." Additionally, this sermon series is the first of several that are based on the narrative lectionary.

Some of you are familiar with the word "lectionary." You know it as a guide that assigns specific Scriptures to be read in worship each Sunday. And you are right.

The lectionary that has been most used in and beyond the ELCA during my lifetime is called the Revised Common Lectionary. It was developed by a group with representatives from eighteen denominations in the early 1990s. And it was an update to one created even earlier called the Common Lectionary.

Currently, the Revised Common Lectionary is widely used in ELCA congregations. It provides four readings each week, including a passage from the Hebrew Bible, a Psalm, a reading from the Epistles, and a Gospel reading.

The Revised Common Lectionary repeats every three years. During each cycle the Gospel readings are linked to the church season and the other texts offer support. According to the Revised Common Lectionary, we are now in Year C.

That is a lot of knowledge about how worship is planned to toss into a sermon. I've added it today in order to introduce the Narrative Lectionary. This newer Lectionary was created in 2010 primarily by two professors at Luther Seminary.

It, like other lectionaries, provides assigned readings for worship each week. Notably, however, it provides just one primary preaching text along with a supporting text. It is packaged into a four-year cycle that focuses on the larger biblical narrative or story. This means that John gets a full year rather than being sprinkled in to the other three years. It also means that we are called to focus on the story in ways that tend to increase biblical literacy. Right now, we are in Year 3.

For the next several months we will be guided by the Narrative Lectionary to explore Luke's Gospel. We will go in order listening to the story chapter by chapter. We considered the first and second chapter of Luke in December. Today we are in the third chapter. Next week we will be in the fourth chapter and by Easter we will find our way to the final chapter, chapter twenty-four.

And so we begin the new year with newness all around. Last week it was star words. Today it is a new lectionary.

But we also begin with a familiar story. This morning's Gospel lesson likely contributed to Martin Luther's interest in and emphasis on baptism.

What exactly did he believe about baptism and what do good Lutherans today believe? First and foremost, we count it as one of our two sacraments. And, second, we tend to begin with Jesus' baptism as our example.

Many of you know that I'm relatively new to being Lutheran. I've spent most of my life in sibling denominations – traditions that are theologically near but that offer different experiences, theological nuances, and other exemplars.

The last time I tried being Lutheran, which was also my only prior experience, was about twenty years ago. Back then I served a large ELCA congregation in Dallas that had a lot of baptisms. And, while I was there, we convened a task force that considered how to improve upon an already good baptismal experience.

That congregation developed a class to cover what the Small Catechism had to say about what baptism is, its benefits, and how it is that water can do such great things. Those involved quickly learned that while teaching good theology about what Lutherans believe about baptism was important, families most appreciated practical support.

That support was well thought out and extended far beyond being present for the baptism. It included coming alongside families during their preparation as well as finding ways to be more intentional about providing support in the months and years following a child's baptism. It created many connections that lasted well beyond their scheduled duration.

Getting back to Martin Luther . . . There are so many stories about him and baptism, including the one I shared during the children's message. You have to wonder if there is something to the legend of him with a large sign in his room that read "when you wash your face, remember your baptism." We do, however,

know that he was fond of remembering his baptism and of inviting others to do the same.

Remember your baptism. You are welcome to do this in a very literal way by recalling the day. Perhaps you have seen pictures or heard stories about your baptism. Maybe you can recall the date. Hopefully you know the basics and are thankful.

The call to remember our baptism is primarily an invitation to reaffirm our baptism. It is an invitation to living wet in an intentional way. It is one way we live out our faith.

Let's return to our Gospel lesson and focus on the final two verses. John has been baptizing folks – all sorts of folks. And, then, John the Baptist's work of baptizing culminates in the baptism of our Lord.

Luke doesn't tell us that there was anything different about the way John baptized Jesus. He does, however, tell us that what happened next was different than anything that had happened before or has happened since.

Heaven opened.

The Holy Spirit descended in bodily form, like a dove.
A voice spoke, "You are my Son, whom I love;
with you I am well pleased."

In response to his baptism, Jesus heard God affirm his identity and call him God's beloved.

Jesus entered the baptismal waters as an adult. Most scholars think he was 30 years old at the time. After exiting those waters and hearing God's words, he began his public ministry.

Today I invite you to do as Martin Luther and many who have come before us in the faith have done and to remember your baptism.

In the waters of baptism, you were clothed with Christ¹ and adopted into God's family.² Whether you were baptized as an infant, a child, a teen, or as an adult, it was a new beginning for you.

Siblings in Christ, remember your baptism. And, as you do, remind yourself that you are God's beloved child. Know that God is very pleased with you.³

Amen.

¹ See Galatians 3:26-27, Colossians 3:9-10, and Revelation 7:9.

² See Ephesians 1:3-5, John 1:12-13, Galatians 3:25-29, and Romans 8:14-17.

³ A translation intended for children, New International Readers Version, renders Luke 3:22 as "You are my Son, and I love you. I am very pleased with you."