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St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw  
The Baptism of Our Lord (First Sunday after the Epiphany)  
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Lectionary Year A: Matthew 3:13-17

It is often said that no one, later in life, laments not having spent enough time at the office. In fact, we typically hear that most people, looking back, wished they had spent more time with their families. And, of course, the world is filled with stories of guilty parents now expressing their regret for not having spent enough time with their children. Years after I completed high school, I realized that this little Lutheran school I attended -- which also happened to have a dormitory -- was a place where a handful of the students were left there by parents who were "too busy" to raise kids. In retrospect, I still wonder what it was like for a teenager from California to live nine months (or more) out of the year on the picturesque but very unfamiliar campus of Oak Grove Lutheran High School in Fargo, North Dakota. And then, I think, too, of what life must've been like at that age to live without a Mom or a Dad and often no surrogate. I never remember envying the kids in the dorm because the dorm seemed like a quasi-penitentiary to me -- though I likely wasn't nearly as independent back then as I thought. Mom and Dad were just more familiar and, therefore, more tolerable.

And though my Dad worked extremely hard, Mom stayed at home from 1980 onwards. But Dad, in retrospect, never seemed like an absent parent, either. My life was likely a far cry in the relationship-with-parents department from that of the kid from California. Who knows how I would've turned out had I been sent away from home and forgotten about...

The generation of which I am a member -- Generation X -- introduced the "latchkey kid" to the world, and, naturally, this is what everyone associates indifferent parenting with; again, I never experienced this myself, but this legacy of Generation X doesn't seem to go away. Thanks to films like The Breakfast Club entering the canon of legendary Hollywood cinema and Pearl Jam, Nirvana, and Soundgarden making it onto "classic rock" radio (that still hurts), we can watch ourselves enter our fifties in fine forlorn, cynical, and yet pragmatic fashion.

It's somewhat amusing to observe how the parenting style of Gen-X moms and dads is such a massive pendulum swing from the parenting style they grew up with. Naturally, latchkey kids became "helicopter parents" as adults. Speaking personally, I am so happy to have grown up before helicopter parenting became fashionable!

But, most of all, I consider myself blessed to have not grown up in an abusive home, and so, for me, the image of "parent" is almost always a positive one. As I expound upon this image in relation to this morning's Gospel text, I hope that your associations are positive, too...

When Jesus was baptized by John in the river Jordan, the voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). This is, put simply, the Father revealing the truth about his Son -- yet it is very possible for us to tread on thin ice theologically here, because of an ancient heresy or false teaching of some early Christians that maintained that God the Father "adopted" Jesus as his Son. Obviously, Matthew 3, verse 17 would be the perfect proof text for this heresy, so we need to interpret the text carefully!

We are not to interpret it to mean that God the Father is acknowledging something that wasn't the case before, because, contrary to Jesus being "adopted" in that moment by God the Father, Jesus has existed with God the Father since the beginning of time. The proof text for this would be the first chapter of the Gospel of John.

The statement, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" is, therefore, a proclamation or affirmation of the One who Jesus already is and has been forever. Such theological nuances may not seem all that important, but, in the interests of keeping a coherent and consistent faith -- coherent in understanding and consistent with the Scriptures -- sound theology is one of our best witnesses!

We could debate endlessly about whether Jesus' baptism confers any sort of special status on him, but I'd prefer not to go there at the moment; we do know, however, that Jesus' baptism, according to the Gospels, inaugurates his public ministry as an adult. There are numerous theories that speculate about what he did during his teenage and early adult years -- such as learning his father's trade of carpentry or heading to Asia to learn Buddhism -- but without authoritative sources to prove any of this, they remain theories. And despite these theories being very interesting and provocative, we still really need only know that Jesus' ministry was preaching, teaching, healing, and bringing good news to the poor and outcast. His baptism, then, is the jumping-off point for this ministry.

But none of this would've happened -- not this ministry and not even the life of Jesus himself -- were it not for the grace of a loving Parent, in God the Fa-

ther. And should the image of a parent be negative to you, please know that your heavenly Parent is nothing like the one you remember on earth. Remember that you, like Jesus, were baptized, and that you came forth from the waters with acclamations of "This is my son" or "This is my daughter, the beloved," spoken by God himself like a proud parent.

Moreover, we believe that our heavenly Father won't dump us off somewhere and let someone else do the work for him -- yet, this, too, may be hard to believe as we remember Jesus' own words from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46b). And from our own experiences, we can remember what it feels like to be abandoned, but realize, as well, that with God we are never completely abandoned. Indeed, we just celebrated the birth of Emmanuel at Christmas, and Emmanuel is God's own Son -- God with us! Abandonment is always remedied by presence, the presence of God with us in those hours of distress and deepest need.

And we receive God's presence in our lives in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Granted, this Baptism is not identical in style or significance to the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, but both of these baptisms contain similar elements. They include a washing with water, an announcement ("This is my Son" or, in our case, "You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever"), and a commencement of a new life or ministry. All this happens because our heavenly Father sees something in us worth loving and saving. We are his precious children, and Baptism proclaims and affirms this good news whenever we baptize and whenever we remember our Baptisms.

Would our heavenly Father dump us off somewhere and have someone else do his

his work? No. Are there any latchkey kids in the Lord's family? No. Is God hovering over us like a helicopter parent, removing things we might run into or trip over? No. Our God is the perfect Parent -- who loves us unconditionally, listens to us unfailingly, and offers us the freedom we need to grow. And all this was most fully and completely revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ. All that is given to us -- the grace of Baptism, the courage to proclaim and practice the truth, and the life everlasting -- was pre-figured in Jesus Christ, who was given to us "for us and for our salvation" as the Savior and Redeemer of the world. God the Father gave us God the Son, and, together with the Father and the Son in Holy Baptism, we live in the Lord's family forever.

God is well pleased to be our Parent.

Amen.