

January 11th, 2026

Sermon: “Beloved and Called”

Isaiah 42:1-9, Psalm 29, Acts 10:34-43, Matthew 3:13-17

Theme: The Lutheran Understanding of Baptism

Grace and peace to you from God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ. Today, we explore the Word that speaks of water, Spirit, and promise—the foundation of our life in Christ through Baptism.

These readings remind us that Baptism is not just a ritual or a memory; it is God’s living action, shaping who we are and how we live every single day.

To fully appreciate Isaiah 42, it helps to understand its historical context. The book of Isaiah spans a tumultuous period in Israel’s history, including the threat of Assyrian invasion and eventual Babylonian exile.

Isaiah 42 is part of what scholars call “Second Isaiah” (chapters 40-55), written during or just after the Babylonian exile, around the 6th century BCE. During this time, the people of Israel were living in captivity, longing for deliverance and restoration.

The “servant” in Isaiah 42 is introduced as a figure chosen by God to bring justice and light not only to Israel, but to *all* nations.

This message was profoundly hopeful, promising that God’s saving work would extend beyond national boundaries and bring healing and renewal to a suffering people.

In this context, Isaiah's prophecy encouraged the exiles to trust in God's faithfulness, even when circumstances seemed hopeless.

The servant's mission was not one of conquest, but of gentle righteousness—a radical vision in an age marked by turmoil and oppression.

This historical backdrop makes the passage's promise of new beginnings and God's steadfast love especially powerful for both its original audience and for us today as we look with hope into the New Year.

Isaiah 42 begins with a vision of God's chosen servant:
"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him."

This servant is Christ, but through Baptism, we are joined to Him. We are not spectators; we are participants in God's mission. Baptism is God saying to us: *"You are mine. I delight in you."*

In a world that often measures worth by achievement, appearance, or status, Baptism declares a different truth: our identity is rooted in God's grace. We belong to God—not because of what we've done, but because of what Christ has done for us.

Psalm 29 paints a majestic picture: *"The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders."*

When we think of Baptism, we often picture gentle water poured over a child's head. But behind that simple act is the *power* of God's Word—the same voice that spoke creation into being.

Baptism is not ordinary water; it is water combined with God's very presence and promise. It is God's voice saying: "*You are forgiven. You are my child. I give you peace.*"

Acts 10:34-43 unfolds during a pivotal moment in early Christian history. The passage takes place in the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion and a Gentile, marking the first time the gospel is explicitly preached to non-Jews.

Up to this point, the early Christian movement was largely centered among Jewish believers, many of whom still adhered to traditional customs and laws.

Peter's vision and his subsequent encounter with Cornelius challenged these boundaries, revealing that God's salvation through Jesus Christ was meant for all people, regardless of nationality or background.

This story reflects the broader context of a church wrestling with the radical inclusivity of the gospel. As Peter declares, "God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."

This moment not only signals a shift in the mission of the early church but also affirms that the good news of Christ's resurrection and forgiveness of sins is open to all.

The historical context, then, is one of transformation—from a small, ethnically Jewish sect to a global movement embracing all humanity in God's grace.

Acts 10 reminds us that God shows no partiality. Peter proclaims that salvation through Christ is for all who believe—Jew and Gentile alike.

Baptism embodies this radical inclusivity. It is not reserved for the worthy or the perfect; it is for sinners, for seekers, for all who long for grace.

In Baptism, we are joined to Christ's death and resurrection. Luther said it so clearly: Baptism "works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe." It is God's work, not ours.

And then we come to our gospel in Matthew 3. Jesus steps into the Jordan—not because He needs cleansing, but to fulfill all righteousness.

Jesus identifies with us, taking our place, bearing our sin. The heavens open, the Spirit descends, and the Father speaks: "*This is my Son, the Beloved.*"

In our Baptism, those words become ours: "*You are my beloved child.*" That is the heart of Baptism—a divine affirmation that nothing can erase.

What does this mean for us today? Baptism is not a one-time event to tuck away in a photo album. It is a daily reality. Luther said we live in our Baptism every day—dying to sin, rising to new life. Every time we confess, every time we forgive, every time we serve, we are living out our Baptismal calling.

In a world of uncertainty, Baptism is our anchor. When we doubt, when we fail, when life feels overwhelming, we return to

that promise: *“You are mine. You are beloved.” That God makes to us in our baptism.*

Friends, Baptism is gift and calling. It is God’s grace poured out, and it is our invitation to live as Christ’s disciples—bringing justice, mercy, and hope to the world.

So today, remember your Baptism. Claim its promise. Live its calling. And hear God’s voice again:

“You are my child, whom I love. With you I am well pleased.”

Amen.