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The Baptism of Our Lord

The season of Epiphany is about signs. Signs that reveal who this baby, who this man, Jesus, really is. Last week we heard about a star, and Magi from the East coming to kneel before a child.

This week, Jesus, and presumably everyone nearby, witness another powerful sign. As Jesus is baptized by John, the heavens open up, the Spirit comes down like a dove, and a voice says, This is my Son, the Beloved.

This is my Son, the Beloved, says the voice of God.

Imagine it. People coming from all over the region to be baptized in the Jordan River, they hear the voice saying, This is my Son. They see the man, Jesus, a poor Jew from a small town in Galilee. This man is God's Son.

A revelation. An epiphany. This is the Messiah, the Son of God.

It was a sign.

We have had a lot of signs in recent days.

Many in New York City, and those looking on, felt that Zohran Mamdani's swearing in as mayor was a sign. A young person with bold ideas, the first Muslim and first South Asian to serve. Cornelius Eady, reading at the swearing in, expressed it like this in the opening lines of his poem, Proof:

You have to imagine it.

Who said you were too dark?

Too Large, too Queer, too Loud?

Who said you were too poor, too strange, too fat?

You have to imagine it.

Who said you must keep quiet?

Who heard your story then rolled their eyes?

Who tried to change your name to invisible?

For Cornelius Eady, and many in the crowd at the swearing in, Mamdani was a sign. A sign that they were seen and noticed. A sign that they counted.

This week we saw the sign of Renee Good. Renee Good, shot and killed in Minneapolis by an ICE agent. Renee was not even the only person shot by ICE this week. But her shooting brought special attention. Because it happened so close to the location of the killing of George Floyd five years ago. Because this sign was not only witnessed by others, there were multiple videos taken by witnesses for all of us to see. Perhaps there was also special attention because Renee was white and a US citizen.

There was the sign of Renee Good this week. Still, not everyone sees these signs in the same way.

There were witnesses. There are videos. But even with footage of the event shown all over the news and social media, people see different things.

She was a terrorist. She weaponized her car. She was a mom. She was just trying to get out of the way.

I wonder what they said in Jesus' time.

I didn't hear anything. You must be mistaken. It's a fake voice. He got someone to say that. Who does he think he is? He's going to get us all in trouble.

Because there are many other signs, many other voices out there speaking to us, all the time. These voices tell us a lot of things, directly and indirectly.

These voices tell us that it is all about us, our achievements, our career goals, our lifelong quest to get more and more. These voices tell us that this is success. These voices tell us that the powerful always win. These voices tell us that compassion for the powerless is at best called charity, not justice, and at worst is weak and a waste of time.

All of us hear these voices, and all of us believe them to some extent. These voices are the water we swim in and the air we breathe.

These voices tell us that it's ok for a country to "run" another country. That leader was a bad guy anyway, and we are good guys. These voices tell us to be afraid, to avoid going out to witness, because we could be targeted next.

There were loud voices in Jesus' time too. Everyone knew that the emperor was the Son of God. Coins minted in the time of the emperor Augustus were stamped with the words, The divine Augustus, son of a god.

This sign at Jesus' baptism, this sign of the heavens opening, the Spirit descending, and the voice calling out, this was not a simple sign for the people of God, for the Jews witnessing it on that day. It was a charged sign, a divisive sign, a political sign. A dangerous sign.

Some onlookers might have minimized or denied the voice because of fear. Some who heard about what happened might have not believed it.

It was a dangerous sign, this voice from above. But also a joyous sign, a deeply hopeful sign.

If this man was God's Son, what did that mean for the people of God?

If this poor Jew from a small town was the Beloved of God, maybe, maybe they were the beloved too. Maybe God had not forgotten them. Maybe God had come to be in solidarity with them. Maybe they mattered, maybe they counted.

St Martin's, we who see the video footage today have to make our own judgement. We have to interpret the signs for ourselves. What we have read and heard and told about this Jesus, is true for us too. Each of us is the beloved child of God, God who in Christ chose to be with the marginalized and

suffering. We, in all our particular identities, are invited to hear God's voice calling to us, calling out in love, and to hear God's voice calling to our neighbor in the same way.

You are God's beloved child. Renee Good is God's beloved child. We are all part of God's family. We must be like Jesus, we must live into our vows of baptism. We must filter through all the voices that shout at us in this world. Inside of ourselves, and standing with others, we must be witnesses to that voice from heaven, God's voice, that calls to all of us. You are my child, the Beloved. Amen.