

Baptism of the Lord
[Luke 3:15-17, 21-22](#)
By Teri McDowell Ott

My children's need for love astounds me. When they were younger, I would lie down next to them in bed after tucking them in for the night. We'd take each other in our arms and talk about the day, saying things reserved for whispered conversations in the moonlight. My son liked me to rub his back and sing "his song"— a simple tune I made up when he was a baby. My daughter wanted to dream about her future, about the horse barn she would one day own and all the animals she will care for there. When I would eventually move to pull away from my children, feeling the call of my own bedtime ritual of time with my husband, a hot bath and a good book, my children wanted more. Now, as preteens, they still want my love, all of it, as a steady drum beat to their search for self. Even a child who is well-loved is insatiably hungry for more.

In his book, [My Bright Abyss](#), Christian Wiman writes: "In any true love – a mother's for her child, a husband's for his wife, a friend's for a friend – there is an excess energy that always wants to be in motion. Moreover, it seems to move not simply from one person to another but through them, toward something else. This is why we can be so baffled and overwhelmed by such love: it wants to be more than it is; it cries out inside of us to make it more than it is. And what it is crying out for, finally, is its essence and origin: God."

The energy of love is, as Wiman says, baffling and overwhelming. It always wants to be more. This is where God steps in. In Luke's surprisingly brief account of Jesus' baptism, the words that stand out are God's, spoken from heaven as Jesus emerges from the water, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). These blessed words of affirmation, love and praise from Father to Son stand out in stark contrast to John's vision of a

messiah who will appear with a winnowing fork in hand, ready to separate the wheat from the chaff. The words of God's love are the words that will sustain us.

Luke's genealogy for Jesus follows this text, which is bland reading, but testifies to Jesus' full humanity. He comes from people much like those who line up with him by the river to be baptized. People who can't get enough love. People who need to hear words of affirmation and encouragement, words of grace, forgiveness and hope. The message of love Jesus receives at baptism sustains him in the wilderness of temptation, through his public ministry, his suffering and his horrific death.

These words can sustain us too, but we also need parents, pastors, friends and loved ones to remind us, often, that we are loved. Too often, the world's overwhelming message is that we are not good enough, not worthy, not deserving of love. But the message Jesus received in his baptism is the message for every person in line behind him.

You are loved. You are God's beloved. You are God's creation, with whom God is well pleased.

Questions for reflection:

1. How did this passage intrigue, disturb, challenge, comfort, encourage or inspire you?
2. Imagine this baptismal scene from Luke. Who do you see waiting in line with Jesus? Who is in need of God's affirmation of love?
3. What messages do you hear that counter God's message of love? Who is here to remind you that you are God's beloved? Are you listening?