

January 11, 2026

Mathew 3: 13-17

Possibilities Unfolding The Baptism of Christ

The sacrament of baptism is still so shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding. In conversations with families, I often discover the desire to have their child baptized is rooted in an expectation to carry on a tradition.

Baptism, though, is a rite not a tradition. It's a moment where a child is claimed as Christ's own. It's a moment where family — both blood and spiritual — make a commitment, promising to raise the child in the faith. And in that moment that I hold the child in my arms, there is a holy, fleeting second where I realize only God knows the future. It is only God that holds the possibilities born at the font that will keep unfolding for the child till the day their last breath is taken.

Yet after the water is sprinkled on a child's forehead, the excitement of these God possibilities is pushed aside for a slice of the celebratory cake and photo ops with the newly baptized.

What does it take for us to remember our baptismal identities as Christ's own? How would that identify then shape our lives?

Thomas Merton, a 20th-century Catholic monk, addressed unfolding possibilities in a letter he wrote to a young mission worker who had become cynical and jaded. First, Merton urged the mission worker to stop relying on a job for fulfillment and to shape one's identity. This is only the world's way of trying to fend off a despairing sense of "nothingness."

Rather Merton advised that, "All the good that you will do will come not from you but the fact that you have allowed yourself, in obedience to faith, to be used by God's love."

Once we truly allow God to use our lives, the need to prove our worth disappears. We are set free to be our authentic selves, allowing God's power to work through us.

"The big results are not in your hands, but they suddenly happen. There is no point in building our lives on personal satisfaction," said Merton.

Through the waters of baptism, we are claimed as Christ's own. But the question remains to be answered: Do our lives reflect who we belong to? Are the possibilities unfolding before us truly God possibilities?

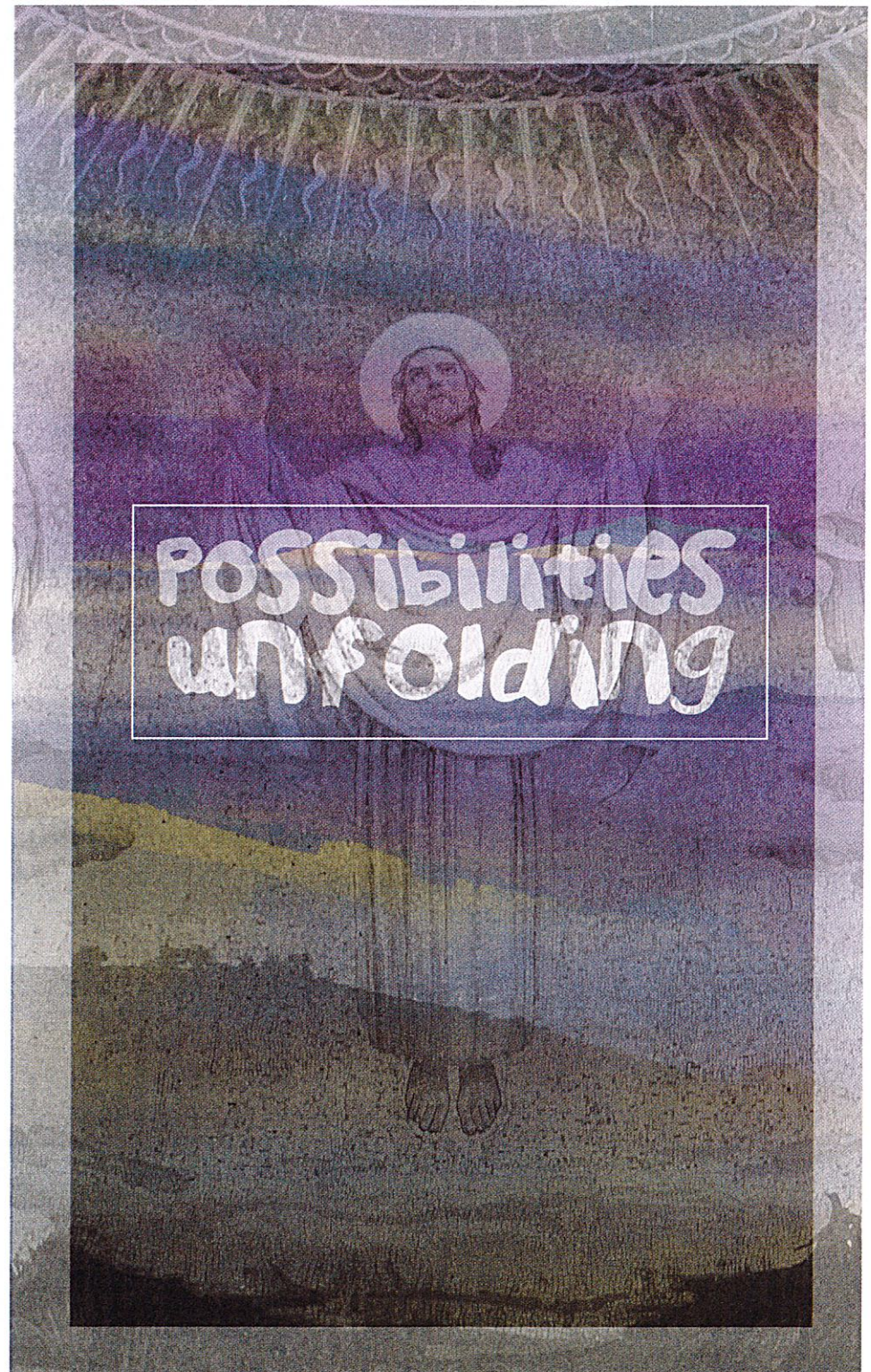
God, we know Your plans for us are higher and better than we could ever imagine. We want to die to self and live for You. We want to claim our identities as Christ's own. Give us the strength to do so. Help us to let go of our tight grip on who we think we are or who we wish to be. May we surrender completely to Your will, so that all Your beautiful possibilities might be revealed. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

(Rev. Donna Frischknecht Jackson is a communications specialist for the United Church of Christ and author of today's Sunday Bulletin.)



8.5" x 11" UCC SUNDAY BULLETIN SERVICE

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St. John's Grace United Church of Christ

1000 S Rolling Road, Catonsville, Maryland 21228

Baptism of Christ Sunday

January 11, 2025 11:00 A.M.

Mission/Vision Statement:

Seek God. Listen. Love. Do.

We are called by God's love to leave a legacy of Christ's love and justice

www.stjohnsuccmd.com

Nursery care is available during service for young children.

ORDER OF WORSHIP

+ Please rise in body or in spirit Congregation reads text in ***bold italic***.

WE GATHER AS GOD'S PEOPLE

Welcome and Announcements

Centering Prayer and Silence

We have waited, and we find again, God is always present.

Jesus came and shouldered the suffering of our world.

Let us anticipate the wholeness and reconciliation.

Let us wait with patience for the day when God's glory is revealed in all its fullness.

Silent Meditation

Lighting of the Presence Candle

In lighting this candle, we acknowledge that:

God is here, now, everywhere, always.

+Call to Worship

The Reign of God has dawned in our hearts:

The prophet calls us to change our lives!

Prepare us to the way of the Lord:

A just and peaceful path!

Welcome one another, for Christ welcomes you:

For the glory of God!

+Opening Hymn:

Gather Us In

Verse 1

Here in this place new light is streaming
Now is the darkness vanished away
See in this space our fears and our dreamings
Brought here to you in the light of this day
Gather us in - the lost and forsaken
Gather us in - the blind and the lame
Call to us now and we shall awaken
We shall arise at the sound of our name.

Verse 2

We are the young, our lives are a myst'ry
We are the old, who yearn for your face
We have been sung throughout all of hist'ry
Called to be light to the whole human race
Gather us in - the rich and the haughty
Gather us in - the proud and the strong
Give us a heart so meek and so lowly
Give us the courage to enter the song.

Verse 4

Not in the dark of buildings confining
Not in some heaven, light years away
But here in this place the new light is shining
Now is the Kingdom now is the day
Gather us in and hold us forever
Gather us in and make us your own
Gather us in - all peoples together
Fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

Text: Marty Haugen, b.1950

Tune: GATHER US IN, Irregular: Marty Haugen

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+Passing of the Peace

Children depart for Church School

Invocation

We long for your peace, and trust in your promise;
we hear your call to turn toward you,
Meet us here and fill our minds with your wisdom
and our hearts with your peace,
that our worship together may open us
to the challenge of your dream of wholeness for all.
In the Name of the One who has come, we pray. **Amen!**

Prayer for Transformation and New Life

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray:
Merciful God, we know that you love us and that you call us to fullness of life, but around us and within us we see the brokenness of the world and of our ways. Our successes leave us empty; our progress does not satisfy. Our prosperous land is not the promised land of others, and our failure to feel the spirit that is within us; through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Amen.

Words of Grace

Hear the good news: Jesus Christ is present with us in the painstaking work of the Reign of God, forgiving our weakness, rebuilding our relationships, restoring our joy. Amen.

WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

The New Testament reading: Isaiah 42:1-9

Ministry of Music: He Is the One Chancel Choir

+The Gospel Reading Matthew 3:13-17

Reflection: Rev. Jeff Munnis

Hymn of Reflection: Wade in the Water FWS #2107

WE OPEN OURSELVES TO GOD IN GRATITUDE AND PRAYER

Prayers of the Church

Prayers of the People

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

WE SHARE OUR GIFTS

Invitation to Generosity:

The Ruler of Peace that Isaiah foretold has come, we anticipate the unfolding of this Gift of God together; our gifts have brought us hope, help to strengthen one another and we also can offer hope to the world. Let us gather our gifts together and present them as an offering to God.

Your generous offerings are appreciated and used for continuing the missions of this church.

For electronic giving, a QR code is available in the pews or in your bulletin at the end of the printed worship service.

+Doxology

*King of kings and Lord of lords, glory, hallelujah!
King of kings and Lord of lords, glory, hallelujah!
Jesus, Prince of Peace, glory, hallelujah!
Jesus, Prince of Peace, glory, hallelujah!*

WE GO OUT TO LIVE AND TO SERVE

+Commission and Blessing

When we leave this place today, let us carry the flame of Hope within us, no matter how small it might seem. We feed it with the knowledge that God's love is incendiary. Our Beloved's breath blows through us, allowing the flames to rise and catch and give us strength all the days of our lives. Amen.

+Closing Hymn: The Baptist Shouts on Jordan's Shore NCH #154 vs. 1,4,6

+Benediction:

We welcome you this morning, and invite you to return, and worship with us every Sunday morning at 11:00 AM

For your convenience you can scan our QR code to contribute electronically.



Name Tags for Members and Friends!

Members and friends are asked to wear name tags for worship time because they help other people. It is also helpful for folks who may know the face but not the name of another. Wearing a name tag is voluntary but shows that you care about others.

If you need a name tag, please ask a greeter or usher at the welcome desk to fill out a badge request slip!

St. John's Grace United Church of Christ
Stjohnsuccmd.com
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welcome@stjohnsgraceucc.org

Senior Pastor and Interim Minister: Rev Jeff Munnis Phone: 415-747-9114
Email: revjeffmunnis@stjohnsgraceucc.org
Office Manager: Barbara Burck Phone: 443-789-2443
Email: barbara@stjohnsgraceucc.org

Connections...

Connecting our community through prayers, thoughts, and actions – no matter where we are today!

WE HOLD in LOVE and PRAYER:

Please keep these friends and loved ones in your prayers! If there is someone you would like added to our list, let Pastor Jeff or Barbara know. The church email is welcome@stjohnsgraceucc.org.

Those added to the prayer list will remain for three months before being removed. If prayers need to be continued for another three months, please let Barbara know your request.

Continuing Prayers

Phyllis Dean
The Behrens Family
Kathy Crout
Addy L.
Family & friends of Debby Carr
Kathy Collins
Sharon Hamilton
Jerry Prinn
Emily Arnold & Brandon Boyd
Lois Benson
Sharon Hayes
Mary Weaver

Serving Our Country

Michael Barbarino Joe Clark
Andrew Robey Jon Fuller
Ty Smith Jay Robey
Tom Myers Josh Tullius
John Howard Jason Shoemaker

Hospice

Jerry Prinn
Emily Arnold & Brandon Boyd
Lois Benson
Sharon Hayes
Mary Weaver

Assisted Living

Doris Bush
Virginia Hoffman

New Address:

Please send cards – January 14th is her 89th Birthday!



Ms. Virginia Hoffman
Copper Ridge
710 Obrecht Rd
Sykesville, MD 21784

Upcoming Meetings & Events

Ministries Council Mtg	Tues, Jan 20 th	6:30 pm	Zoom
Board of Trustees Meeting	Tues, Jan 20 th	7:30 pm	Zoom
Congregational Meeting	Sun, Jan 25 th	10:45 am	Sanctuary
Sorrento's Restaurant FR	Sun, Jan 25 th	Begin at noon	Arbutus
Fundraising Meeting	Sun, Feb 8 th	12:00 pm	Meeting Rm

Governing Body Minutes

Our governing body consists of the Board of Trustees and the Ministries Council. Meetings are held monthly via Zoom. Interested parties are welcome. Minutes of the meetings are posted in the office hallway. Contact the office if you would like a paper copy or email copy.

View Past Services on our Website

If you missed a worship service here at St. John's Grace, you can now view the service on our website!

Go to www.stjohnsucemd.com Worship/ Online Worship tab and scroll down to the service you would like to view.

They are on our YouTube channel so you can subscribe if you like.

Deadline for Submitting Announcements

Announcements or changes to announcements need to be submitted by noon on Tuesday prior to the Sunday service to be included in the bulletin. Email to barbara@stjohnsgraceucc.org.



Annual Congregational Meeting – January 25, 2026

Announcing our winter Annual Congregational Meeting will be held on Sunday, January 25, 2026, at 10:45 am prior to the worship service held at 11:00 am.

The agenda, minutes from the last meeting and our Annual Report for 2026 will be emailed and available by the greeter desk.

Girl Scout Cookie Sale at Church

Our Girl Scouts will have cookies available to buy in the Parlor on Sunday, February 8th from 9:30 am to 11 am!

Get your favorites before they are gone!

Thank you for supporting the Girl Scouts.



Restaurant Fundraiser in January!

Join us on Sunday, January 25th as we gather to enjoy good eats at

**Sorrento of Arbutus Pizza Italian Subs –
5401 East Drive, Arbutus, MD 21227.**

Starting at noon – mention St. John's Grace and a percentage will be donated back to the church.



Church School every Sunday

Calling all children! We invite you to share in worship together with your children at the 11:00 am service. After opening hymns and prayers, the children depart for Church School for the remainder and continue learning about God's Word through storytelling, hands-on activities and fellowship.



Westside Men's Shelter Donation Needs

1) Warm socks, hats and gloves are needed this winter for the men at the shelter. Donation bins are in the hallway.



2) There is an ongoing need for shower shoes (flip flops) and these can be given and collected at any time into the bin in Mission Hallway!

3) Stay Tuned for dates to Serve a meal at the shelter coming up.

See Connie for details or for more information on any of these items.

CEA: January is for Our "Souper Sunday" Drive

All kinds of soup are welcome and needed:

Tomato, chicken, veggie, cream, seafood.

Easy-open or need a can opener.

Cans can be big, small, tall, or squat.

Soup can be for a snack or hardy enough for a meal.



What kind of soup do you like? Say a prayer for the person who receives your gift of a can of soup.

Mission & Outreach Transitional Hold-Alls



The National Capital Treatment and Recovery Center
(a nonprofit organization based in Arlington & Alexandria, VA)
provides substance abuse and mental health treatment to those who
need these services. One of their programs is an 84-bed residential
treatment center for men who are in need. When admitted, these
men usually have their belongings in paper bags.

*You can help them feel prouder when they leave with the
donation of gently used or new backpack, duffle bag, or piece of
luggage.*

Please forward donations for Ken or Charlene Mowery.



TIME for WINTER

CLEAN OUT

Used Clothing Drop-Off Shed

Sponsored By:

St John's Grace United Church of Christ

With the help of Turnkey Enterprises, LLC

Location:

**1000 S. Rolling Road, Catonsville, MD 21228
(Parking Lot)**

Items Accepted:

All clothing, shoes, sneakers, belts, purses, blankets, sheets,
pillowcases, drapes, and stuffed toys.

(Your donation **will not** be cut up or shredded)

(Please – **no** rags, fabric scrapes, toys, or household goods,
**please understand that the above-mentioned items are a
hardship and expense to dispose of.**)

Turnkey Enterprises, LLC:

Turnkey Enterprises LLC is a for-profit company that
partners with non-profit organizations in communities to help
support their fundraising needs by recycling unwanted
clothing. The clothing collected is used as clothing, not cut
into rags. Turnkey services each location and pays the
sponsoring organization by the pound for the unused items.
www.turnkey-enterprises.com

Help us keep your donation clean and dry

Please put your donation in plastic bags. Thank you.

There are receipt forms in a slot in the mailbox in the hallway
outside the office