Yesterday January 6 was Day of Epiphany – it is always on that day. The Baptism of our Lord is the first or second Sunday in January.

Since the two celebrations are so close and I couldn’t decide this year, which day to observe so I thought I’d use texts from both.

The 1 and 2 readings are for the Baptism of our Lord the Psalm and the Gospel are for Epiphany.

But both gospels support my message.

You see last week I challenged you to listen closely to seven lessons being read

In hopes that you might hear something new or maybe a familiar text would bring new meaning,

(Pause)

I wasn’t really thinking about myself or how it might affect me. I should have because this often happens...to all of us...I believe

, when reading something from scripture it will change in its meaning or we will hear something we hadn’t before or maybe had forgotten.

This time, for me, it came from Luke chapter 1.

When the angel said ‘Do not be afraid, **Mary**...; you have found favor with God.

It was the name **Mary** that jumped off the text and into my heart.

Mary... was not just the **favored one, the one whom the angel said God was** **with**...but she was **MARY**!!!

Hearing her name gave me pause and I realized just how intimate that moment must have been for her.

Having lived an ordinary life, --under the radar-- even. A young girl, a peasant they say,

to be called upon to do God’s work in this magnificent way...

To hear the divine call her name must have been amazing.

(Pause)

Also When the magi arrive at the manger they see that the child is with **Mary** his mother.

Again she is pointed out in a more intimate way...not only as the mother of this newborn child but as **Mary**

(Pause)

In contrast, then, before the magi arrived at the stable they had gone to see the king and in this instance Jesus is not named,

but simply referred to, by both the King and the magi,

as THE CHILD...

this of course, was before the magi met the Christ baby and really understood who he was.

Without **names**, everything can become generic. In the Acts reading today (picked for the Baptism of our Lord) the people were baptized in the **name** of the Lord Jesus.

(Pause)

When you were born your parents gave you your name...for better or for worse.

in the upper corner of the bulletin the little baby is .....

A little humor ...in case you wonder about your name.

You may not know the hows and whys but you are stuck with this name. So you grow into it, you eventually own it, you are that name.

When someone calls you by your name, it is personable...and hopefully endearing to you.

When you receive bread at the Lord’s Supper I say your name to make it more personable. So that you know Jesus died for just you.

(Pause)

In your Baptism you are told you are a child of God and your full name is said out loud.

Baptism is so important in fact, that Mark begins his gospel in that way...with Jesus’ baptism.

Matthew and Luke give us the story of Jesus’ birth, the angels, shepherds and the wise men---but for Mark

Jesus’ baptism is the beginning of his ministry.”

(Pause)

In that same vein then, our baptism marks “the beginning of a new life and a new calling” for us.

At baptism we are given a candle – lit by the Christ candle as a sign of the light of Christ being given to us.

The very same light that hovered over the stable that night long ago, the one the Magi followed.

(Pause)

The light that manifests in the glorious birth of Christ, the same light that descends in the form of a dove on Jesus on the day of his baptism –

(Pause)

The gospel we didn’t read today – the one about John the Baptist who comes out of the wilderness, dressed in camel clothing, proclaiming Jesus’ arrival...

John baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River and as Jesus rises up out of the water a voice from Heaven calls Him His **Beloved...God claims His Son.**

...in the same way then, like Jesus, when we are baptized God claims us as *His* beloved.

(Pause)

You also may have noticed the plaque sitting beside the water wall when you came in this morning.

The words, **You are my beloved**.

I put it there to remind you **who and whose** you are.

the light of Christ lives within us and goes with us ...which we are reminded of each week when the acolyte carries this light out of the church at the end of worship.

It is that light which goes with us wherever we go.God fills us up with brilliant light and always prevails ... Deacon Marsha Roscoe of this synod writes,

“regardless of how we feel about winter, in the midst of the darkest, shortest days, the indwelling light of Christ shines brightest.

...we are named ...we are beloved. We are a light for Christ.

(Pause)

In Shakespeare’s play Romeo and Juliet, Juliet says “a rose by any other name would smell as sweet,

meaning that Romeo Montegue would still be her beloved even if that were not his name.

(Pause)

The same goes for us...

no matter what our name,

God has called us ... to do his work.

(Pause)

so we ask God to give us the divine gift of direction. Guide us and lead us...so that we might be the beginning of the peace...that we all yearn for

(Pause)

We are called Personally, by name

we are God’s children...and we are God’s beloved.

We are the light of the world. AMEN.