

Year B, January 7, 2018
1 Epiphany
Christ Church, Mexia

You are merciful, O Lord. You remind us that in the fullness of your time, you sent your Son to be a witness, teacher and guide for us. You sent Jesus to teach us how to truly live as people of faith and hope. May we always be aware of your presence. AMEN.

Br. Curtis Almquist, SSJE, reminds us about lobsters. I know we don't have many in Texas, but I think you know about them. He asks us, how does a one-pound lobster grow into a lobster weighing three pounds or even ten pounds, when it has such a hard shell – a shell that does not grow? Well, of course, the lobster must shed its shell in order to grow. It is a dangerous process because during the time it has no shell it is very vulnerable; but that is the only way it can grow. To remain in the same shell would cause stagnation and even premature death. We don't have the hard shell of the lobster, but to grow spiritually, we need to become vulnerable.

Br. Luke Ditewig, also SSJE, believes that; "God risked descending all the way down, not to perfection, not to security, but to vulnerability. Jesus was fully human by constantly inviting to risk amid uncertain outcomes, first as a baby (as we remembered during Christmas)." Then he comes to be baptized, being immersed under water, and afterward goes off to the wilderness, alone, and apparently with no food or water. These things suggest vulnerability.

Brene Brown, one of our own in the Diocese of Texas, has studied, written and spoken about vulnerability since the early part of this century. She defines vulnerability as "uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure." In other words, when we engage in things that have uncertain outcomes, when we allow ourselves to feel and act in love towards others, when we risk taking action even though we are fearful or face many obstacles, we are vulnerable. Simple things like saying no, standing up for yourself or for someone else, sharing an unpopular opinion, or trying again to do something at which you have previously failed, are examples of vulnerability.

Saint Irenaeus, a bishop of the church during the 2nd century, is quoted as saying: "The glory of God is a human being fully alive." We see this in the life of Jesus time and time again. He makes himself

vulnerable in loving and healing others and in opposing those in power or the cultural norms of the time, and many other acts.

Brene believes that vulnerability is actually courageous. In her words, "It's daring to show up and let ourselves be seen. Vulnerability is daring greatly." That is what we are called to do; it is what we agree to do in our own baptismal vows, even though it makes us vulnerable.

And it is not just Jesus who models such behavior for us. The "wise men" make themselves vulnerable to many things in their journey to find Jesus – following the star. Next week we will recall how the disciples responded to Jesus' call – and look what they did for the church after Christ's death and resurrection. We see it in the lives of all the "saints" of the church. We see it in some of our neighbors here. Remember that courage is not the absence of fear, but rather acting in spite of it.

To love is to be vulnerable. To truly love requires the help of the Holy Spirit. While we see the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus at his baptism, and we believe that we receive it at our baptism, my own experience and that of others with whom I have spoken, indicates that it may actually be some other time in our life when we truly receive and act upon the gift of the Holy Spirit. But whenever it happens, our lives begin to change. That's how we know! We become better able to be vulnerable – to truly love. We become stronger in being able to live into the promises of our Baptismal Covenant.

If Christmas is the period of God coming to us, then Epiphany is the season of our going to God. Jesus' baptism is the beginning of his ministry. It is a reminder of our call to ministry – a time at which we must allow ourselves to be vulnerable. In the words of John Westerhoff III, "God makes us new people and our world a new world. We are called to respond by living in the world in ways that reveal to others that the possibilities of God are realities. We are to live so that when people look at us, they will see a manifestation of the life they long for and dream about, and when they see us acting in this world, they will see a people who are naïve enough to believe that God's reign has indeed begun."

During these weeks of Epiphany, I invite you to shed your "shell" and to grow in the knowledge and love of God. In a word, I invite you to become vulnerable.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.
Amen.