

TEXT: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
THEME: "With you I am well pleased."
SUBJECT: Baptism
TITLE: Your Song

First Sunday after Epiphany
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Messiah Moravian
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I heard a story of an African tribe where the birth date of a child is marked, not from when the child is born nor from when the child is conceived, but from the day the child was a thought in her mother's mind.

When a woman desires a child, she goes off by herself and sits in silence under a tree and listens until she can hear the song of the child who wants to be born. Once she hears the child's song, she comes back to the man who will be the father and teaches him the song. They will sing the song when they make love as a way of inviting the child into the world.

When the mother is pregnant, she teaches the song to the midwives and the old women of the village. When the child is born, the old women sing the child's song to welcome her into the world.

As the child grows up, the other villagers are taught the song. If the child falls, scrapes her knees, someone will pick her up and sing her song to her. If the child does something wonderful, she will hear her song sung. When she goes through the rites of puberty, the people of the village sing her song, welcoming her into adulthood.

This continues throughout her life. When she marries, her song and her husband's song are song as part of the wedding ceremony. At the end of life, as she lies dying, all the villagers will sing her song for the last time.

The song reveals what is most deeply true about the person. The song holds her identity for her, should she forget who she is and begin acting like someone else. The song reminds her, should she begin to lose her grip, that it makes a difference she lives, works, loves, cries and cares.

Given the cacophony of voices clamoring for our attention, distracting us from what is life-giving, do we have a song that reminds us who we are and what matters most? That song is the song of our baptism. It is sung by God: "You are my daughter/son, beloved by me, with you I am well pleased."

Oscar Wilde, Irish playwright, novelist, essayist, poet and wit, was born in Dublin in 1854 to Sir William Wilde and Lady Jane Francesca Wilde. Oscar's parents were eccentric. His father was an eye and ear surgeon, author of significant works on medicine, archeology and folklore, particularly concerning his native Ireland.

Lady Jane longed for a girl and when Oscar arrived like an uninvited guest, she was somewhat miffed. However, she generally pampered him. Persistent rumors about his parents sexual adventurism may have aroused doubts in Oscar about who his father was. This mild fear concealed in Oscar a far deeper concern to establish his true personal identity.

Declan Kiberd, in "The Times Literary Supplement" (Dec 16, 1994), concludes: "Oscar's famous parents were probably too busy to offer the one commodity that is signally lacking in all his plays, that *continuous tenderness and intimacy* which might have given him a sense of himself."

"That continuous tenderness and intimacy which might have *given* him a sense of himself." Growing up in an unreliable, unpredictable environment, without a dependable human presence, leads to pathological perceptions of self, others and the world. Our secure identities depend on a dependable other.

We literally cannot simply depend on ourselves to know who we are. Something about the very nature of our spiritual existence has to do with that confidence that my rhythm is echoed, my speech is understood, my face is seen, that I am read.

The search for myself is the search for the dependable other who recognizes me, whose recognition lifts from me the burden of making myself up or working desperately for a recognition I can't take for granted.

Without a sense there is a fundamental place to be that is secure, where we feel at home, where we are known and accepted, no clear perception of reality is possible and we are in trouble.

As one family therapist wrote in *Peoplemaking*, "I am convinced that there are no genes to carry the feeling of self-worth. It is learned. And the family is where it is learned. You learned to feel high self-worth or low self-worth in the family your parents created. And your children are learning it in your family right now."

In our baptism we hear the voice from heaven singing our song. It is a song sung before the lightening flash of creation, before we were conceived. It is the song sung by the angels at our birth. It is the song the church sings to us each time we fall and wound our souls. It is the song sung to us at confirmation, at our wedding, at the birth of our own children. It is the song sung when we lie dying: "You are my daughter, my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased."