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Genesis 1: 1-5
Acts 19: 1-7

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE BAPTIZED

This weekend the moon appeared as much as 30 percent larger than normal. Yes, it is true! Astronomers alerted the public to the phenomena of a full moon coinciding with the moon's elliptical orbit when the moon is actually 30,000 km closer to the earth than usual. The moon travels in an oval orbit around the earth and every few years, a full moon occurs at just the right time to coincide with the moon being closest to earth. Friday night was one such event.

On December 21, 2008, the winter solstice occurred. The mid-December solstice is when we experience the longest period of darkness in one night. After December 21, the days slowly started getting longer. Yes, I know this is about the earth's orbit around the sun and the rotation of earth on its axis (23.4 degrees). On or about March 21, the vernal equinox occurs when night and day are about the same. (Equal darkness and light.)

We remember all of this Jeopardy trivia today because these seasonal events are reminders of midway points in our experience of winter.

OK, maybe these events are not foremost in your coffee break conversations, but they could be. In some ways these events remind us we are right in the middle of things. The middle is often where works of literature start. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; Peter Wolk's *Master and Commander*, even Pink Floyd's *The Wall*; and the TV series *Lost*; or Nabokov's *Lolita* were started in the middle and went back to tell what happened to get to this point, before going forward to the end.

Our Genesis reading about the first night and the first day seems to start at the beginning—unless you consider where God was before God's spirit hovered over the waters, or what God was up to before creation.

Mark, on the other hand, is beginning his gospel account "in medias res"—smack dab in the middle of things. Have you ever wondered why Mark's gospel starts smack dab in the middle of Jesus' life? I think Mark is careful to distinguish Jesus from other divine figures of the Mediterranean.

Other gods could be depicted in statues or idols; other gods were either male or female; other gods propagated and created imperial families. Mark was faced with the task of overcoming mortal (fake) gods with the reality of the one true, living God. Roman "gods" had texts and portraits, partners and heirs. I believe Mark knew that most Roman emperors actually chose or adopted their successors rather than hoping for a qualified biological son to reach adulthood. Mark starts mid-story because faith is lived mid-story.

Our baptisms indicate we are a part of something different than their world's idea of power! We are called to be different, peculiar, passionate people, not of the world. Baptism is steeped in fake images, such as being a pre-requisite for entry into heaven. God has not baptized us to get us straightened out, so we can fly-fly away someday in the by and by. We have been baptized into what God is doing here and NOW!

Baptism reminds us that God has chosen to love us, not out of obligation or because we deserve to be loved, but because God has decided to love us back into our created goodness. This is our calling in baptism, receiving the new nature which pleases God. Baptism is the ongoing experience of God's intimacy with us! Baptism is a call to be a religious roustabout—a religious roustabout declaring all must surrender to God!

Amen.