

All Nations

2afterEpiphany

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Isaiah 49:1-7

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last week we heard about Jesus' baptism, and the prophecy that was fulfilled at that time. God had prophesied through Isaiah that He would put His Spirit on His chosen one, His Son, in the years to come, and the Spirit was witnessed descending upon Jesus like a dove. One who saw the Spirit's descent was John the Baptist. He was the one who was preparing the way for Jesus, and who nearly didn't baptize Jesus because he knew that he needed to be baptized by Jesus.

John had been doing baptisms of repentance, but here was the Lamb of God, the One about whom John had proclaimed would do baptisms of fire—that is, baptisms with the Holy Spirit.

Having looked at Jesus' baptism last week, and now that John's baptism was no longer to be practiced, we will look at the baptism Jesus would bring this week. As John had prophesied, Jesus' baptism would be of the Spirit of God. So for whom, then, was this baptism?

Those of you who remember your catechetical training remember that Jesus' baptism—the one done in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit—was and is for “all nations.” That's what Jesus commands at the end of the Gospel of Matthew. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

So, who are “all nations”? We hear our answer from St. Peter in the Acts of the Apostles at the time of Pentecost. After he explains to those gathered that the apostles were not drunk as some supposed but that they were filled with the Spirit, he also tells them how they were the ones who had put Jesus, the Lamb of God, to death. The men and women gathered are cut to the heart and ask what they can do. Peter replies, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Sadly, in today's society, there is dispute concerning the word “children.” Are the children in the womb people who need to receive this gift when they are born? Like last week, our Old Testament text from Isaiah sheds light on this very topic.

Verse 1

Our text begins with these words: “Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name.”

This passage is a quote from Jesus about when He would be in His mother's womb. As God's chosen, He would be called to be God's servant and would be given a name while He was still in her body. Now it may be hard to wrap your head around all the things going on with just these couple verses—in fact, it may not be possible to name them all. But again, as God, Jesus knew everything before it would take place, so He knew that His name would be given to Mary and Joseph before His birth. He knew that the work He would be doing would be spoken by the angels to the shepherds before He would leave His mother's body. And at the same time, Jesus says “me” and “my name.”

Despite what scientists or doctors or great thinkers may think today, Jesus, God Himself, has shown us by His words that He was Himself even in Mary's body. Such is the case for all children in their mother's wombs. They are just that: children. They are not just some clump of cells. They are beings with personalities. That is how Jesus could say the Lord would call “me”—He Himself—from His mother's womb.

In this way, Jesus has made it clear that “all nations” includes those children in the bellies of their mothers. They are already human beings with their own characters. Granted, they may not be fully developed characters. I could not graduate from the University of Illinois at Springfield having studied postmodernism and majoring in Psychology and attempt to tell you that children won’t learn and be shaped by the things that they learn. But again, Jesus still says “me.” He would still be Himself in His mother. Dr. Seuss was correct when he wrote that “A person’s a person, no matter how small.” in his work, “Horton Hears a Who.”

As children are already themselves in their mother’s bodies, then they would be included in the “all nations” who should be baptized, even if that baptism would be done after they leave their mother’s bellies.

So all children, even those yet unborn, are included; but who else should be baptized as our Lord Jesus was baptized? We continue through our text.

Verse 2

“And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him...he says: ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’”

In these verses Jesus says that He came to “bring back Jacob...and that Israel might be gathered” and also that God was going to “make (Him) as a light for the nations.” “(A)ll nations,” then, would include not only children, but every man and woman of every age, race, or socioeconomic status—poor or rich—of Jacob, Israel, and indeed all of the nations.

God wants His salvation to be shown to every person that they might repent and believe for their salvation. In that way, “all nations” means just that, everyone. God would have it that everyone come to faith in His salvation—the one Jesus Christ had come as the babe in the manger and was baptized into ministry to proclaim. And God has given the gift of baptism—not just to identify Jesus as His chosen servant—but for everyone so that everyone might receive God’s Holy Spirit and be brought to and strengthened in the faith in Jesus to life everlasting.

These verses, then, like many others in the Scriptures—from Jesus proclamation at the end of Matthew that “all nations” are to be baptized in the Triune God to Peter’s reply that “the promise is for you and your children—these verses show that everyone needs to be baptized. On the other hand, these verses do not say why the servant Jesus needed to come; but the simple fact God was sending Him shows that there was a need for Him to come.

Not only is everyone to be baptized, but everyone is under the curse of sin. After the first human beings sinned, the entire race was thrust into its effects, as well as the rest of the planet, and universe. Unborn children may not have committed any sins while in their mothers, but they do have the inheritance of Adam and Eve that they are sinful creatures because of the Fall. So yes, everyone should be baptized into Christ, and everyone needs to be baptized into faith in Him in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Verse 3

Everyone needed a Savior, and that’s why God sent His Son to be His Chosen Servant. Jesus’ baptism last week marked Him as that Servant, and His life and especially His death in your place and my place proved

Him to be the very Savior we need. Jesus took the sins of the whole world for all of time with Him to the cross to pay the price we rightly deserve to pay. Now that He has done that, the payment has been made and we no longer need to. Instead, we need to, and through faith, do see why God said Jesus was His beloved Son at His baptism. God knew what Jesus was going to do even before it happened.

So our text concludes: “Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers: ‘Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.’”

These words, like the words of Isaiah last week, are for God’s Chosen Servant, His Son Jesus Christ—but they bring us comfort as well. Today, we live in a sinful, fallen world. We see its effects every day, and every hour. Children are born into this sinful world, yet their births are not curses, but blessings. And elderly people and sometimes younger people die. Death is a curse, but for those who have faith, it is no longer a curse, but a door to life everlasting, through Jesus’ work as God’s Chosen. That faith is given in baptism.

Granted it says in Mark that only unbelief condemns, not lack of baptism—but if baptism is the gift of God and gives the Holy Spirit who creates and sustains faith, why wait? Isn’t there enough sin and problems in the world to show a need for baptism? And the gift is for you and your children. It is for “all nations”—for everyone. Once you have been baptized, the Holy Spirit works in your heart so that when Jesus returns and kings prostrate themselves before Him, you will have no need to fear. Your sins will have been forgiven through that blessed flood of baptismal water, and you will have been sustained in the faith by the Holy Spirit working in you to come and hear regularly how Jesus was and is God’s Chosen Servant, sent to save you and all nations.

In Jesus’ Name. Amen.