

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Baptism of Our Lord  
January 8, 2023  
Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus' Baptism – For You

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:13-17 ESV)

Dearly Beloved, in the Name of Jesus,

Christmas is now over. The twelve days have run their course. We've now entered the Epiphany season where we see Jesus revealed as the divine Savior. It started with the visit of the Wise Men and their being guided by a star and the Word of God to find Jesus, their worshiping Him, and their giving of gifts. It continues today as Jesus is revealed to be God's Son when He is baptized.

Now, Jesus' Baptism is remarkable! The Holy One of God came to John to be baptized by him. But why? John was a preacher of repentance. He called sinners to repent of their sins and he baptized those who did. His baptism forgave sins.

That's why, when Jesus, who is sinless and who is the Way, came to God's appointed Way-preparer, to be baptized by him, John tried to dissuade Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" John was right, of course. John was a sinner, and he knew it. Jesus was not, and John knew that too. John knew that he needed what Jesus had come to give. Yet, Jesus comes to be baptized like a common sinner who needs God more than anything else in the world.

So Jesus answers John, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." But what does this mean? Quite simply, Jesus is here uniting Himself with sinners. He, as the Sinless One, is doing what the sinners are doing, being baptized. And in so doing, Jesus is standing in for us. He's becoming what we are. He is embarking on the walk that will lead Him to the cross. Luther wrote, "He is entering into our stead, indeed, our person, that is, becoming a sinner for us, taking upon Himself the sins which He had not committed, and wiping them out and drowning them in His holy baptism," (LW 51:315). St. Paul tells us that the Father made Jesus who had no sin of His own to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

So here is the Son of the Living God asking to be baptized "to fulfill all righteousness." Not that He needs Baptism, mind you, but because Baptism needs Him! It's as if Christ was baptizing the water with His Body so that you might be baptized by the water into His Body. Christ put Himself into the water so that the water might put Him into you. Indeed, it might be said that there has been only one baptism ever - the Baptism of Jesus. As Paul says, "One Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all." (Eph. 4:5). Every other baptism, including yours and mine, is not a repetition of Jesus' Baptism, but an incorporation \*into\* Jesus' Baptism.

In His Baptism, Jesus Christ became the greatest sinner on earth as He took upon Himself the sin of the whole world. In order to reconcile you to God, Jesus became what made you wrong with God. He took on all your sin. The rebellion, rejection, and apathy we all have toward God was laid upon His shoulders in His Baptism. He takes on our grief, our pain, and our sin, and He makes it His own.

More than that, He also clothes you with His perfect righteousness and holiness before God. He's like a rich man dressed in fine clothing who finds some poor beggar in rags. And then the rich man not only undresses the beggar and washes him clean, He strips off His own fine clothing and puts them on the beggar and then he puts the beggar's rags on Himself. And so we see a blessed exchange - Christ not only takes off your filthy rag-like sins by forgiving them, He clothes you with His own righteousness.

Remarkable as this is, there's more. "Jesus . . . came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" Yes, the Baptism of Jesus opens wide the gates of Heaven; bestows the Holy Spirit; and proclaims sonship on the one who is baptized. And this happens not just this one time, but every time someone is baptized in the name of the Triune God. The remarkable day you were baptized, you were baptized into the Baptism of Jesus, and because of that, His life and work now become yours.

The gates of Heaven are open wide, not to let God out, but to let you in, to let you into your own country, your own city, your own home - that home that was earned for you by God's own Son! For in Baptism you are granted citizenship in the new creation, the heavenly Jerusalem, the mansion on high.

And not only are the gates of Heaven opened to you now, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon you, in the very same way that He came to and alighted on Christ in the form of a dove there at the Jordan.

In Genesis we learn that Noah sent out a dove from the ark to see whether the flood of destruction had gone down enough for him, his family, and all the animals to leave the ark. In Jesus' Baptism, the Father sent the Spirit in the form of a dove so that you might know that the

Man upon whom the dove landed would deliver you from the flood of His wrath. Baptized into Christ, the dove of the Spirit rests upon you, making your heart and mind His nesting place.

And if that weren't all remarkable enough, in your Baptism the Father proclaims you to be His son. As St. Paul told the Galatians, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ"(Gal 3:26-27). When you were baptized, the same words spoken over Jesus were, in effect, spoken over you, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well-pleased." You're a son whether you're male or female for you are a member of the body of the One who is the Father's Son. Just as there is truly only one baptism, and you're baptized into it, so there is truly only one Son and you're baptized into Him. One Son, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all.

This is why Holy Baptism is the foundation upon which the Christian faith is built. We can truly say with St. Peter that "baptism . . . now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21 ESV).

My friends, Jesus was baptized for you. He was baptized to take on your sin and give you the robe of His righteousness. And this is none of your own doing, but totally the work of God. You are righteous and holy in His sight. You are baptized. You are a son of God. You have a heavenly home.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener