

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church

Shobonier, Illinois

The Baptism of Our Lord B

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Mark 1:4-11; Romans 6:1-11

The Baptism of God

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:9-11 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

In the Advent and Christmas seasons, the focus is on Jesus, the Son of God, coming in the flesh, taking on our humanity. From the angelic announcement to Mary, to the trip to Bethlehem, to the birth of Jesus and the tender details surrounding it, to more angels and the shepherds, to His circumcision on the eighth day, to His presentation in the temple and His revelation to Simeon, to His return to Nazareth to be raised by Joseph and Mary – we see Jesus the baby boy. The Epiphany season, though, focuses more on His divinity, that is, that the Son born to Mary is truly God. Thus, the day of Epiphany, which was celebrated yesterday, on the thirteenth day of Christmas, reveals Jesus as divine as the Magi, or wise men, sought Him by following a star and gave Him gifts. Today, the first Sunday after the Epiphany, Jesus is revealed to be God's Son in His baptism by John.

Now, the Gospel of Mark doesn't have much preliminary information concerning Jesus other than stating that John was "baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." (Mark 1:4). And immediately, Jesus comes to him to be baptized.

At first, this is hard to understand. After all, John's baptism was for repentance and the forgiveness of sins and Jesus had no sins of which to repent and needing forgiveness. He wasn't a sinner.

You, on the other hand, are most certainly a sinner. You have many sins to repent of and to confess. And so do I. You and I need to make a trip to the wilderness, to hear John preaching repentance. For you and I daily sin much, in thought, word, and deed, in what we do wrong and in what we fail to do right. Reading the Ten Commandments will pierce through our self-defense rationalizations. Realize how seriously God takes the breaking of His commandments

and how penetrating His eye is. You will soon discover that you have plenty of sins to confess. You will begin to see how deeply rooted sin is in you.

But with Jesus, this was not the case. He is the sole exception in the whole history of humanity. He is the only one without sin. Jesus is pure and holy as He comes to the Jordan to be baptized. He is, in fact, the sinless Son of God, who kept God's law as it was meant to be kept in every way.

So, why is He getting baptized? Because He came to rescue sinners. And to do that, He needed to identify with us. Jesus gets in the water with us, going where sinners belong. For the ministry that He is about to begin will take Him to where sinners deserve to go: to death, death under God's judgment.

"And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening." The heavens were torn open, they were rent, split apart. Isaiah wrote, "Rend the heavens and come down." (Is. 64:1). And so He has. There's almost a violent feel to it. And this is right at the start of Mark's gospel. And at the end of this gospel, you will find this same "split apart" word used again, when at Jesus' death the curtain of the temple is "torn in two." Already here at the start, at Jesus' baptism, we are given a hint of what's to come.

The heavens are being torn open. By God's Son undertaking His saving mission of identifying with sinners and going to the cross for them, there is a deep cosmic shift going on. At Christ's baptism, there is an intersection of heaven and earth going on. Heaven is opening up, so that the Father and the Spirit can add their blessing to what the Son is doing.

Which is what they do. First, the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove and comes to Jesus. This shows that God's blessing, favor, and choice are empowering this Man, the Christ, the anointed one. Jesus is being anointed with power to do the work of His public ministry, which He is about to begin. Wisdom, healing, blessing—these will mark Jesus' ministry, as He inaugurates the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

The Spirit descends, and a voice comes from heaven. It is the voice of the Father, giving divine approval, assurance, and encouragement to His Son as He undertakes His mission. "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." The Father was well pleased with the Son from before the foundation of the world, knowing that the Son would willingly take on this mission to redeem the world. Now, as the incarnate Son begins that journey to the cross, the Father speaks His approval and His love.

And this has everything to do with you. The triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are united on this great plan to redeem sinful humanity, even as they were united when God created the world (Gen. 1:1-4). They are united in saving you. That redemption will

only happen through Jesus identifying with us sinners and taking our place and bearing our sins into death.

At His baptism, Jesus sets out on this course that will take him to the cross. And since He has completed that journey and defeated sin and death, the result is complete forgiveness for you and final victory over death. This is what Jesus won for you by making that journey from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

And now Jesus shares His victory with you when you are joined to Him in your baptism. In Holy Baptism, you are connected to Christ and united to Him. You have been joined to Jesus. He shares with you all the blessings He won for you by His cross and resurrection. And so the baptism of our Lord leads to the baptism *with* our Lord. We are baptized with Christ and into Christ.

That's where Paul goes with his teaching on baptism in Romans 6. Paul says that in our baptism we have been united with Christ in His death and resurrection. This has profound implications for both our daily life and our eternal life.

For our daily life, it means a daily dying and rising with Christ. Dying to sin, and rising to newness of life. The forgiveness of sins is not meant to be used as a license to sin. That is a distortion of God's grace, and Paul strongly argues against that. Just because God is gracious and forgives sins should not be taken as an excuse to go on sinning. No, Christ died for those sins, so how can we go on living in them? We have been joined to Jesus, buried with Him in baptism, and our old sinful self needs to be put under the water and drowned every single day. We come up out of that baptismal water each new day to live as the new people we are in Christ. We have been joined to Jesus, connected to Christ, and that will show up in the way we live. That's what baptismal living is all about.

Connected to Christ in baptism means everything to us for eternal life too. Our sinful self has been put under the water with Jesus and drowned. Our sins have been washed away. We are forgiven. Peace with God once more is made. No obstacle, no barrier, exists between us and God. The heavens have been torn open, and the way is clear. Christ has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. You, baptized believer in Christ, have eternal life. You have eternal life already now, and that means death will not have the last word. You have been joined to Jesus in baptism, and therefore you will share in His resurrection from the dead.

The baptism of our Lord leads to the baptism with our Lord. Christ puts all the benefits of His baptism into ours. He takes all our sins upon Himself and gives us all His righteousness in their place. Christ, who was anointed with the Spirit, baptizes us with the Holy Spirit, to give us newness of life now and eternal life forever. The heavenly Father, who called Jesus His beloved Son, takes us as His own beloved sons and daughters.

This is the power of baptism: that our Lord got into the water with us sinners, washing away our sins and putting His righteousness and His life into our baptism. The Baptism of Our Lord leads to our baptism with our Lord, and that means life for you and me. God grant that we live in that baptism every day to His glory. Amen.

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

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