

Sermon for The Baptism of Our Lord

Date: January 12, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 43:1-7

Epistle Reading: Romans 6:1-11

Gospel Reading: Luke 3:15-22

Sermon Text: Luke 3:15-22

Sermon Title: I am Baptized



Introit: Psalm 19:1-4; Antiphon: Psalm 19:14

Hymns:

LSB 601 – All Who Believe and Are Baptized

LSB 588 – Jesus Loves Me

LSB 605 – Father Welcomes

Liturgy:

Divine Service III, p. 184



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Text: Luke 3:15-22

People's hopes were rising as they all wondered whether John was the Messiah. John replied to all of them, "I baptize you with water, but the one who is more powerful than I is coming. I am not worthy to untie his sandal straps. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing shovel is in his hand to clean up his threshing floor. He will gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn the husks in a fire that can never be put out."

With many other encouraging words he told the Good News to the people. John spoke out against the ruler Herod because Herod had married his own sister-in-law, Herodias. He also spoke out against Herod for all the evil things he had done. So Herod added one more evil to all the others; he locked John in prison.

When all the people were baptized, Jesus too was baptized. While he was praying heaven opened, and the Holy Spirit came down to him in the physical form of a dove. A voice from heaven said, "You are my Son whom I love. I am well pleased with you."

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

If you were to take a survey of Christians and ask: When was Heaven opened to you? Many would point to the death and resurrection of Jesus. They would not be wrong. His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave provided the atonement, the payment, and forgiveness for all of our sin. The rift between us and God, caused by our sin, has been overcome by God in Jesus, and so in Him Heaven again is opened to us.

Yet today in the Holy Gospel reading we heard an amazing thing:

When Jesus had been baptized, and was praying, the heavens were opened.¹

They were opened not to let the Holy Spirit out to descend in the form of a dove, and not so that the Father's voice could be heard. They were opened because already in Jesus' baptism, His death and resurrection have begun. In the waters of the Jordan He is already taking His place with us sinners. He is already taking the sin of us sinners on Himself. The water of His baptism means that the wood of His cross is not far away.

Just as the curtain in the Temple was torn open when Jesus died on the cross opening our access to God and the Holy of Holies through the blood of Jesus, so also already here in Jesus' baptism, heaven is torn open. His work of salvation, of saving us, has begun.

This is why the Father is well pleased.² Here we see God's heart and His great love for us. He is pleased when His beloved and Holy Son jumps into the sinful cesspool of the Jordan. Not to wash His own sin away, He had no sin, but to take our sin and our death on Himself.

You're probably not happy when your children jump in mud puddles and dirt, but our Heavenly Father is here well pleased, because the death of His Son means the life of the world. This is what God has been working for through all of history.

Not only is the Father well pleased, the Spirit of God also descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove.³ The same bird that signaled to Noah that the death and destruction from the flood were over, now descends in a dove to show us that the death and destruction of our sin is over. It is over in this One, this man now anointed by the Spirit, and so given the title 'Christ,' which means the Anointed

1 Luke 3:21

2 Luke 3:22

3 Luke 3:22

One. He is the one chosen from before the foundation of the world to do this very thing,⁴ to work this very work, to save us from our sin.

So when Jesus is baptized, Heaven opens. Jesus' work and ministry for us is not a series of unconnected events which unfortunately ended at the cross. No! From start to finish His work for us is a seamless whole. From start to finish it is a singular work, for us whom He created, but who fell into sin and death. He does this to re-create, through the forgiveness of our sin and a resurrection to a new life; to make us something new.⁵ That is why He was born. That is why He was baptized. That is why He came.

That is why you are Baptized. If Jesus' work and ministry for you is a seamless whole, a singular work, then it is a work not yet complete. He is not content to open Heaven in general. He wants to open Heaven for you. So as His public ministry begins with His baptism, so it ends with His command to His Church to "Baptize all nations in His Name."⁶ Which means to do it for Him, in His place; in His stead and by His command. So now with Baptism in Jesus' name; in the Name of the one true Holy Living Triune God, it is as if God Himself has done it. So you can be sure: whatever is here promised, whatever God has claimed of these waters, is yours. This is not man's doing, or the Church's doing, but God's. The work and ministry of Jesus, continuing for you.

So what exactly is happening to us in Holy Baptism? St. Paul told us in the reading we heard from Romans. In short Jesus' death and resurrection is happening to us. You heard these words:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.⁷

Just as the baptism of Jesus was a defining moment in His life and work, the start of His public ministry, so it is with us a defining moment and the start of our ministry. You are, from that moment, not what you were before. You are a new creation. The wages of sin is death, but that cost is paid in your Baptism. You, really you, drown and died in those waters. The old Adam in you was put to death.

4 Ephesians 1:4

5 Revelation 21:5

6 Matthew 28:19

7 Romans 6:3-5

Jesus joined you with Himself in His death on the cross. In Baptism, you get death over with. So you never have to really worry about death, whenever and however it may come to you, because God has taken care of that for you, you died already.

Not only that, but because just as Jesus did not remain dead and in the grave, neither do you!

If you are joined to Him in His death, you are also joined
to Him in His resurrection.

You are raised in Holy Baptism to a new life. A new life set free from sin and death. A new life of faith. A new life as a child of God. A child anointed by the Holy Spirit, and with whom your Heavenly Father is well pleased, and for whom Heaven is open!

All of that is not just future-talk. It is meant to make a difference in your life right now, and everyday. Just as Jesus' work for you continues still, so does His work in you. Giving you His Holy Spirit and giving you Himself as He gives you His body and blood, His Holy Gospel, and His Holy Absolution, to strengthen the faith given you in Holy Baptism, and to "*forgive us our trespasses*" when we go jumping in the mud puddles of life in this world. His work continues through you, as you live as His child, "*forgiving those who trespass against you*" and living as the royal priest⁸ you are, bringing others before the throne of a Holy God in prayer, bringing God and His Word to those around you, and doing good to all.⁹

For the Christian, Baptism is never an "I was" event, but always an "I am" event. It is not a past event, a baby thing, but an ongoing and continuing reality throughout everyday of your life. So that when the devil attacks us we do not fear him, but boldly proclaim: "*I am baptized!* Devil, you have been defeated." When sin overcomes us and assails our conscience, we boldly retort: "*I am baptized!* My sin is forgiven." When death or distress come on us, and the devil tries to make us think we are unworthy of God and destined for Hell, we boldly insist, "*I am baptized!* Heaven is open to me." The One whose sandals even the honored John the Baptist was not worthy to untie,¹⁰ has come to you, as unworthy as you are, and has made you worthy.

You can, you should, say, "Yes, *I am baptized!* Heaven is open to me. My Lord's work for me, and in me, and through me, is not just in a series of unconnected and unrelated events, but from first to last a seamless whole, a singular work, to make me His own."

8 1 Peter 2:9

9 James 2:15-17

10 John 1:27

That is what He does. He gives you the right¹¹ to say, “*I am baptized!* I am a child of God.”

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

11 John 1:12