

Christ was baptized . . . for us

On January 7th, 1979, 42 years ago, was a very important day for me. In fact, it was the most important day of my life. Although I don't remember it, because I was too young. I was baptized. I became a child of God. It happened at Mt Olive Lutheran church in Mankato, MN, which I can't remember either. We moved away when I was little. And Pastor Wilhelm Peterson baptized me. I don't know who he is, other than the fact that he was the pastor there at the time. There are many of you here today who don't remember your baptism because you were baptized as a baby like me. There are others of you here today who do remember your baptism, because you were baptized later on in life. Regardless of what your memory is of your baptism, it was the most important day of your life. Today I want you to go home appreciating it like never before.

I feel like I spent the last month getting ready for our celebration of the birth of Jesus. Like most churches, that is one of our highest attended worship services. Everyone knows what Christmas is all about. But the gospel of Mark that we are looking at today, didn't even mention the birth of Jesus. But he does start out his book with the baptism of Jesus. He gives the impression that his baptism is even more important than his birth. Even the other gospels that mention the birth of Jesus, skip over his entire childhood, with the exception of the boy Jesus in the temple when he is 12, and go right to when he was baptized. Why?

Out of the thousands of years of the history of the world, there are 3 years that are more important than all the rest. They start with Jesus baptism. They end with Jesus ascension into heaven. All of history was leading up to the work that Jesus would perform during that time. And all of history after Jesus' life is changed because of Christ. So, the baptism of Jesus is the turning on of the spotlight for the world to see the work of our Savior. So his baptism is really for our benefit, to take away our doubts.

It shows us that this is the guy we've been waiting for. Mark isn't just writing a biography on the life of some person. He shows you that this person's life is important . . . for you. This is your Messiah. This is your Savior. This is the one we've been waiting for. Look at what happens after Jesus is baptized. "Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." See the baptism of Jesus as his public inauguration. Joe Biden was voted in back in November, but his public inauguration will be later on this month. In the same way, Jesus was chosen as our Savior back in the garden of Eden, but would be publicly announced and seen on the day of his baptism. That was done for us.

I think we easily take for granted that we know that Jesus is the messiah that we've been waiting for. But for thousands of years people waited for him to come. When Simeon laid eyes on Jesus in the temple, he sang a song that said, I can now die in peace. My eyes have seen your salvation. And there are people all around us in this community who aren't aware that Christ is their Savior. Sure they know who Jesus is. They know of him. They know he is a guy who died on a cross. But do they believe that he is a Savior . . . for them. Do they believe that they will spend an eternity in hell without him? Do they believe that the Savior would forgive them for the horrible things that they've done in their life? Do they believe that the only way that they will go from this world into heaven is through Christ? Do you believe that? Even the best of us question our faith at times. And it seems when we aren't questioning it, we take it for granted.

So, we have to understand why God said what he did at his baptism. We don't know how many people were there. It may have been just John and Jesus. There may have been others. But I am and you are part of the audience of what happened there on that day, by virtue of the fact that it is written in the bible. God wanted us to hear these words that he spoke. Why? Think about what he said, "You are my Son." So God publicly says, this is the Son of God. Could you get a better witness of who Jesus is?

Then he says, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Don't think of this so much as a sentimental love. But see this more as God's approval. For the first time in history, God was pleased with a human. The 30 years leading up to this moment, there wasn't a shred of hate, lust, impatience, anger, greed, disrespect. He announces to you that this person is God, and that this is a perfect, sinless human being. That's different. That's unique. That's what we needed in a Savior. God shows his credentials to us to take away our doubt.

This is something that is so common for us in so many aspects. When you are driving your car and you get pulled over by the cops, they don't set up a bunch of cones and ask you to weave through them. They don't ask you to parallel park. They ask you for your license and that is the proof that you have passed any test necessary. It proves that you are certified. Our world is all about having a license. You need a different license to drive a bigger truck. You need a license to go scuba diving, to go hunting, to practice law, to have a day care, to fly a plane. And the list could go on and on.

Because when someone questions who you are and what you are doing, you don't start explaining that you watched a couple of Discovery channel specials on how to fly a plane. You don't tell them that scuba diving seems simple enough that and that you are a decent swimmer. You simply show them the license which proves that you were certified, that you are who you say you are and that you can do what you say you can do. On the day of Jesus Baptism he was certified not for his benefit but for ours. If there was ever any question about Jesus being our Savior or about Jesus being the Son of God people could think back to his baptism and say that God himself certified him. He said that he is his Son. He is our Savior. Your faith is based not on a hunch that Jesus might be the savior. You can be sure.

Later on the Apostle Peter writes about this event – the baptism of Jesus - and he says what it is. “You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.” (Acts 10:38) Peter says that when Jesus was baptized, he was “anointed”. He was publicly set apart for his job of Prophet, priest and king. He was public inaugurated as our Savior. There is no one else, nothing else that we should be looking for or hoping for. So he was baptized to encourage us, and to take away our doubts.

But he was also baptized for another reason, to save us. It's not in our lesson, but in the account of Jesus' getting baptized in Matthew, we see Jesus asking to get baptized and John the Baptist, says, “No”, which makes sense. John the Baptist knew that Jesus was the Messiah that we were all waiting for. John the Baptist knew that baptism was meant to forgive sins, and that Jesus didn't have sins. But Jesus says this about why he wants to be baptized, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt 3:15). To fulfill all righteousness – what does that mean? Simply put: his baptism was for us, for our benefit, to save us.

There is so much written on this topic about how people try to understand this phrase that his baptism fulfilled our righteousness. Some say, his baptism “validated” our baptism. Some say that in the same way that our sins are taken away on the day of our baptism, Jesus picked them up on the day of his baptism and carried them to the cross. Some say that Jesus baptism is the source of the blessings that we receive in our baptism. There is obviously some kind of connection to our salvation that is made in his baptism. This was one part of all that Christ would do to give us his holiness. His baptism identified himself with us, people who are rebellious and in need of redemption. His baptism connects him with sinful humans and us with him.

And isn't that the point. We who were separated from God, on our way to hell, and enemies of God, on the day of our baptism everything changed. Christ is in our heart. He couldn't be closer. Heaven is ours and we are children of God. I know baptism doesn't look like much. A little bit of water, a few words and it's done. But just because you can't see the Holy Spirit descend on a child, doesn't mean it doesn't happen. Just because you can't see the heavens open and you can't hear the voice of God, doesn't mean it doesn't happen. Because on January 7th, 1979 God looked at me and said, “Because of Christ, you are my child, whom I love. With you I am well pleased.” And that's what he's said to you too.

The Apostle Paul says this about the connection between us and Christ that is made through baptism. “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Romans 6:4-5) Our baptism connected us to Christ and all that he would do during those three years. His death, means the death of our sin. His burial, shows that our sins are buried and gone. His resurrection, means that we will rise just like he did. The day you were baptized is the most important day of your life, because the triune God went to you as an individual.

Imagine an old small church out in the country. The funeral just ended and there is complete silence as an old wooden casket is being carried out and placed into the cemetery that's right next to church. They lower the wood box down into the hole. The pastor stands there with a shovel in his hands and says, earth to earth, and there is loud thump as the dirt hits the wooden casket. Ashes to ashes, and another thump of dirt on the casket. Dust to dust and one more thump to end it. On the day of your baptism, it was the words, “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” That buried your sin for good.

And what a blessing for a little baby. A baby who can't understand God's Word, a little baby who can't take the Lord's Supper, has one important way that they can be connected to Christ – baptism. On that day, God made a promise to you and not the other way around. This isn't your commitment to God. This is God's commitment to you. That's why it doesn't matter how old you are, because God is making the promise to you. I heard one person tell me that they have a god child and every year on their baptism date they get them a gift. It's one simple way to remind a child of the importance of the day they were baptized. Make sure your child or your god child knows that because they were baptized and because Christ was baptized they are connected. They are seen as holy by God. You are seen as holy. Doubts are gone. Certainty is ours because a connection to Christ has been made. Amen.