

Text: Mark 1:4-11
Theme: "This Changes Everything!"

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Baptism of our Lord B
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Earlier I stood here by the baptismal font and poured water into the bowl, reminding us of our baptisms. We gave thanks for water, something we relish and enjoy here in the lakes area of Minnesota. We remembered how God has worked through the water to lead His people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. We remembered Jesus being baptized by John the Baptizer in the Jordan River. We remember also God's blessing on Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Water has played an important role in our history as children of God. And so today we commemorate Jesus' baptism. That seems strange in light of the Christmas story. One of the questions I'm asked quite frequently concerning Jesus' baptism is "Why did Jesus have to be baptized?" He certainly didn't need to be baptized. He was perfect and sinless. John even asked that question of Jesus in our other Gospels. In our Tuesday morning Bible Study we talked about the 'why' of Jesus being baptized.

Water in baptism was nothing new. The Jews used baptisms as a sign of repentance, an act of washing away their sins. They could do this ritual washing many times—even daily if they wanted.

But with the Baptism of Jesus, everything changed. When Jesus came up out of the Jordan River, Mark tells us the heavens were TORN OPEN and the Holy Spirit descended from heaven like a dove, and lit on Jesus. (Once something is torn open...it cannot easily be repaired.)

If that wasn't enough, a voice from heaven spoke: "You are My Son, the Beloved; with you I am well-pleased." Wow! We don't know if anyone other than Jesus heard this, but what an affirmation of Him and His ministry! This tearing of the heavens and the presence of the Holy Spirit changed the ritual baptism of the Jews into the powerful Sacrament we have today.

As we begin this New Year we face many unknowns. Our lives keep chugging along as they have the past months, but with a New Year something is different. We sort of 'reboot' emotionally. Some people have made New Year's Resolutions about things they'd like to change or do differently in 2018. We also start a new tax year and there are a number of uncertainties that seem to be popping up with changes being implemented.

Then think about all the things coming up this year – things that you don't even know about now. Think about the changes that occurred last year that you hadn't planned for, or that took you by surprise. Then think about the unknowns coming our way this year! There will be changes

taking place for us personally: think of the graduations upcoming, the changes in careers or moves made because of different jobs; there will be weddings—some being planned already—and there will be births—some being anticipated already! This year will involve unplanned illnesses, accidents, hospitalizations, even deaths. There will be decisions to be made: big decisions and small decisions. There is just so much we don't know and can't anticipate. We simply can't be prepared for all that lies ahead. And, truth be told, we wouldn't want to know everything that lies ahead of us this year. It would ruin the surprises—and bring about more anxiety than we could handle.

In the midst of these uncertainties we have the Gospel for today. We have our Lord Jesus, the promised Messiah, who has grown into the man that stepped into the river to be baptized. He didn't need that baptism—but we did! Jesus received an affirmation of who He is and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to lead Him as He fulfills His role as Messiah.

We may not realize it but this baptism of Jesus really changes things for us as we go through our day-to-day lives. Thinking about the things that lie ahead of us this year and on into the future can be a daunting – overwhelming. Until we remember that God is with us through all of it, down to the last minute and down to the last detail.

Jesus' baptism changed baptism for us—because His baptism was **for us**. In our baptisms we are washed clean of the Sin of our Origin, the sinful state we are born into, and we are claimed by the One who offered Himself for us. We are adopted as Christ's own; given the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven; we are deeply and dearly loved by our Lord.

In spite of how we may be feeling about ourselves, our lives, or our own personal worth, this Gospel changes everything for us. Jesus has claimed us and chosen us as His own children. There is nothing we could do to make Jesus love us more, and there is nothing we can do to make Him love us less. Infant baptism is a perfect way to explain this: infants cannot choose to be baptized; they have not done anything to earn the love of their parents and Jesus. They are loved for who they are. Period. That is true for us throughout our lives. We are loved by God, we are chosen by Him and Jesus Christ died for us, not on the basis of what we do, how much we give, or anything else. We are Christ's children, heirs to the promise of eternal life; we have the Holy Spirit who walks with us throughout our lives and guides us—if we only listen to Him.

So in our baptism we are claimed and chosen. We are also given the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to be with us—**to be in us**—throughout the ups and downs that we will face: past, present, and future.

God is with us to walk with us—strengthening, encouraging, granting us grace to become the people God wants us to be.

God's words to Jesus at His baptism are for us as well: "You are my beloved child. With you I am well-pleased." These are amazing words for us to hear. They are words that will shape our lives during this New Year. God, in Christ Jesus, has chosen us. We are deeply and dearly loved by the One who gave His life for us. Carry those words close to your hearts this year and repeat them often. "You are my beloved child. With you I am well-pleased."

Amen.