

Baptized, For You
Matthew 3:13-17
Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri
January 12, 2020 – The Baptism of Our Lord



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. On the night of Jesus' birth an angel appeared to certain shepherds who were out watching their flocks by night – and when this angel appeared to them, he made an announcement of great joy, saying: "This day is born to you in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord." As you consider this angel's proclamation, which do you think is more important – that the Savior is born, or that the Savior is born "to you?" Of course, you know the answer. The most important part of the angel's announcement is when he says the Savior is born "to you," or more personally – "for you." To be sure, these words of the angel are not only central to his proclamation of our dear Savior's birth, but even more importantly, they are central, essential, yes, even indispensable to your hearing of this message of life and hope. Indeed, if you don't comprehend, apprehend, or possess for yourself the words "to you" – or "for you" – then for you the birth of this Infant Savior has no meaning, and you will never possess the eternal life He came to bring us all.

"A Savior has been born for you, who is Christ the Lord." It doesn't matter a whit that this Savior has been born, unless you first understand that He's been born "for you." It doesn't matter that there actually is a Christ unless you also understand that this Christ is your Christ. Think about it: If I tell you the story of a man who finds a one hundred dollar bill lying in the street, you might think the story is interesting or entertaining, but soon you'll be asking: "What is that to me?" That one hundred dollars is found by someone else is purely information – useless information which has absolutely no bearing at all on your life and well-being. But, if I place that very same one hundred dollar bill into your shirt pocket and say: "This is for you" – then, all of a sudden, it's going to have great meaning and import, because now it's your money.

So it is also with Christ. The news of a Baby Boy born in Bethlehem – even if that Baby does happen to be the only Son of God, begotten from eternity – will mean absolutely nothing to you unless and until you understand that this Child who is born has been born for you – that He is your Baby, your Brother, your Blood-Relative. This, you see, this is the full weight and import of the angel's message: "To you this Day is born a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord." This Child is still God in the flesh whether you, I, or anyone else believes it to be true. But, when you hear the divine, life-giving proc-

lamation that this Child, this God, this Savior is now your Child, your God, and your Savior, then suddenly – as Luther reminds us – you will have become so strong that you no longer fear your own sin, your own death, or in fact, the Prince of Darkness, Satan himself. The story of our Savior's birth, life, suffering death and resurrection is nothing more than just another story until you understand it as your story. That's when you will begin to grasp the fact that this story is nothing less than the history, news and reality of how God has accomplished your redemption and has given you the gift of eternal life.

Therefore each of us must learn from the angel's message that everything Jesus is – everything Jesus does – He does and is for you. Just consider for a moment all the other events of our Lord's life in this same light. Our Lord and Savior wasn't only born for you, but He was also given the name "Jesus" for you. You are one of His people – and His entire reason and purpose for coming into our world was to save His people from their sins. On the eighth day of His life, Luke records how Jesus was circumcised for you in order to bind Himself to and fulfill every demand of God's Law that rightly condemns you to hell. As Jesus grew up in the home of His parents, He obeyed them for you, completely submitting His all-powerful divinity to their discipline and training, in order that He might become your Elder Brother, "the Firstborn from the dead."

And that brings us to this morning's Gospel, where we just read how our Lord Christ came to the Jordan River to be Baptized by John. Hear again the angel's message with new ears: "Today in the Jordan River a Savior has been Baptized for you; who is Christ the Lord!" This Baptism will be of no use or value for you unless you are also able to see here a Baptism accomplished for you – unless you're able to see here your own Baptism. Listen again to how St. Matthew records this event. He writes: "Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be Baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I need to be Baptized by You, and are You coming to me?' But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he allowed Him." Jesus was saying to John: "Yes, I have come to you to be Baptized – but I also came to be Baptized for you! For without My Baptism, John, the Baptism with which you are now Baptizing would have no power at all." Jesus is saying that without His Baptism,

there can be no Christian Baptism – that without His Baptism, this water with which people are Baptized with is just plain water and no Baptism – but that with His Baptism, Christians will have a real Baptism rather than just a nice ceremony of dedication. They'll have – as St. Paul calls it – a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit. That's why it was proper that Jesus submit to John's Baptism – even though John was unworthy of such a great honor, and himself ought to be Baptized by Jesus.

You see, everything Jesus is – everything Jesus does – He is and does for you. He makes this Font – and indeed every font where Christians are Baptized, a tributary of the Jordan River where He was Baptized – a body of water in which you are made to stand by the side of our Lord Jesus. In this Font, all your sin is washed away as it flows into the water and onto this Savior who has been Baptized already in His Baptism to give power to yours. Standing there in the watery filth of all we are by reason of our sin, Jesus was fulfilling His role as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” In that same Baptism, that same Jordan River, that same Baptismal font, God clothes you with the holiness and perfection of His Christ – so that now St. Paul can confidently write that all who are Baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ and now wear the wedding garments of salvation.

Look carefully at this Gospel, dear Christian, for here is where you see most clearly the death-defying strength and power Jesus' Baptism brings and gives to you. Take John as the example. Jesus' presence in Baptism is what made John able to do something he otherwise would have found impossible – for remember, Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be Baptized by John. But John tried to deter Him, saying: “I cannot Baptize You, Jesus! I'm too weak, too sinful, too full of death. What I need is to be Baptized by You!” But Jesus' presence in Baptism is the very thing which makes John able to do that which he otherwise would have found impossible. Jesus' presence in Baptism is what makes John's life righteous, a life able “to fulfill all righteousness.” In Jesus' Baptismal presence, John's many inabilities simply fell dead at Jesus' feet, so that John the sinner was thus able to consent to the impossible. John the righteous was able now to fulfill our Lord's request that He be Baptized.

Now the same thing that was true for John is also true for you. It's Jesus' presence in Baptism that makes you able to do things you would otherwise find impossible – and I'm not talking about the ability to leap tall buildings with a single bound. Instead I'm talking about

accomplishing much greater things than that! For example, without Christ it would be entirely impossible for you to be anything but unrighteous and filled through and through with sin. But Jesus' presence in Baptism fills you with His righteousness – even though outwardly your heart and mind may be completely devoid of any inherent righteousness of their own.

Jesus' presence in Baptism clothes you in His righteousness – so that now God is able to rightly call you righteous and holy. Without the presence and power of Christ in your life, your three greatest enemies – the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh – would continue to exercise and exert complete mastery over you. Without Christ, it would be entirely impossible for you to defend yourself against – or to defeat these dreadful enemies. But Jesus' living presence in you through Baptism enables you to do things you otherwise would find impossible. Jesus' presence in you through Baptism has robbed your enemies of their powerful hold over you, and has made you victorious over them! On your own, you couldn't even look kindly toward God, much less obey Him, love Him, believe in Him, or put your trust in Him. But Jesus' presence in you through Baptism changes all that. In Baptism, Jesus gives you the gift of the Father's love, so that you might then properly love, believe in and rightly put your trust in Him.

Dear Christian, our Lord Jesus does nothing that hasn't been done for you. So, again I say to you, “Today in the Jordan River a Savior has been Baptized for you; who is Christ the Lord!” Don't underestimate the value of this event for your eternal life, for here is where the switch – the great exchange – has taken place. Here is where Jesus gives you His perfection for your imperfection – His righteousness in place of your sin. Here is where the deal is eternally set in place. Here is where Jesus, the sinless Lamb of God – having been made sin for you – takes away the sin of the world – and most especially and importantly, your sin. Here in the Jordan is where the gun of justice is loaded and aimed directly at our Lord Christ rather than at you. And in the soon-to-be-upon-us penitential season of Lent, the trigger of that gun will be pulled, and our Lord Jesus – who is Baptized for you – will then also become the One who dies for you. All this He does to procure and ensure your salvation, and to reserve a place for You in His Father's house forever. May it always be so for His name's sake. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.