

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
Baptism of Our Lord  
Isaiah 42:1-7  
January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015

From the ridiculous to the absurd. It seems the news headlines we see today is usually, “either/or.” A man in Illinois had a turn signal lever removed from his arm. It got in his arm as a result of an accident that happened 51 years ago. Another news story from this past Christmas season tells how a man nearly drowned to death in an eggnog chugging contest. And then a headline from my home town newspaper read, “Alton attorney accidentally sues himself.” Absurd.

Here’s another absurd headline, this one from the Israel Sun Times circa 700 B.C., “**Prophet Claims Coming Lord a Servant.**” Of course, I just made up that paper, but if it were in fact real, that headline would be based on this verse we heard from Isaiah chapter 42, “*Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.*” What an absurd headline. The Lord’s chosen... the Lord of lords and the King of kings, is a servant? But that is exactly what He is.

We have said it before and it is worth repeating... Christmas now past was the season where God became man for the sake of the world. This day, the Baptism of our Lord, the first Sunday in the Season of Epiphany, is the time in which the church celebrates how the man Jesus is made known as God to the world. He is made known that His ministry is beginning in a very humble place... knee-deep in water submissive to the baptism of a man who wears strange clothing and has an odd diet. The way comes onto the scene in the ministry He put forth for the people that He loves so much would begin with a strange headline in the Jerusalem Journal circa 30 A.D., “**Crazy Prophet Baptizes Son of God.**”

Sounds like a headline made for today’s tabloids. Sounds like a pretty foolish thing... The Son of God, the Messiah, is a servant receiving baptism from the hand of a strange fellow in the Jordan River. And besides, when we think of servants, we don’t think of Kings. We think of rather menial work that frequently require more brawn than brain. We don’t expect too much of servants – just to do what they are told. In contrast, Isaiah in the Old Testament text for today speaks of the Servant who gets the job done as the One who sets high and lofty goals.

The Lord Jesus who was called to servanthood is reminded by Isaiah, “*I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.*” You see the goals of Jesus, the Servant, were neither to publicize nor merely to reaffirm the covenant agreement God made with Israel of old. He came as a Servant to be the very essence of that covenant, to bring personally to God’s people the full love and grace of God that the old covenant had promised. There were those who were blind to God’s grace. His presence in their midst gave them light. They were able to see what the Lord was accomplishing by coming to be with His people, to be baptized like His people, to show that He is with them from beginning to end.

So now we see that Jesus would be the kind of servant that has lofty goals and they all include you. It is no doubt true that we imitate those we admire. The seemingly silly headlines that included Jesus, will also include you as well. In other words, let us imitate Jesus the servant. His Baptism was not for His forgiveness. No, He needed no forgiveness. His baptism was for us – to show how He comes – to show He came to be like you and me so that we too can be a servant like Him. Let us remember in all our activities that our goal is nothing less than to serve our Lord by presenting Christ crucified and risen as the world’s only hope and Savior.

We, as much as anyone, need a good example. Yes, as Christians we are called to be just that to our families, to our friends and coworkers. But who are we going to turn to as someone we can look up to? Well, that can be hard. You perhaps can recall men and women of good repute that have served as that example of how to live a faithful life focused on the things that truly matter... especially when temptation may tread our way, or, we are not acting the way we should. Of course Jesus is our example. However, men and women need someone they know in the personal relationships we have in this place that we can look to and say, "I want to be like them." This is not to say these men and women are perfect. They fall. They have their good days and their bad. But how a person handles their failings will speak volumes about what kind of man or woman they are.

When we speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, when we defend the mistreated, when we help the infirmed, when we pay attention to the lonely, when act like the kind of person God has called us to be when no one is looking... this is how we become those men and women who our children, our neighbor's children, and even the people we don't know all that well will say, "I want to be like him." This kind of person is becoming harder to find. Won't you be that person?

Jesus comes to show us how. The headlines read, "**The King Arrives to Spread Good Cheer.**" And indeed He does. Good cheer is what we have when a King is born. Good cheer is what we express when Jesus begins His work. And not just because He is showing us a good way to live. More importantly, Jesus begins His ministry in water to show us where we begin our life. At the font, with the Word and the water, at baptism. You see, the Word and the water were both at the Jordan that day John baptized Jesus. Jesus is the Word – the Word made flesh. And so it is still for us today. The Word and the water are ours – together – for a forgiveness of sins we need, which comes only by Christ, for our life today – a life today lived out in Christ and for Christ.

Do you want to hear one more absurd headlines? "**Chief of Sinners Forgiven by Man Born in a Manger.**" You know who the chief of sinners is – it's you. And you definitely know who the man born in a manger is. We have a Servant King that makes Himself known in those shallow waters, baptized by a strange man, and begins His trek to be raised on a wooden throne made to be a cross on a lofty mount called Calvary for all the people to see. He did all this for you. He made headlines for you. He's the least "self-serving" King to ever live because He lived for everyone else except Himself. That is why He died.

And today, He is still making headlines. He wants you to be a part of those headlines. His ministry is active for you and through you. That means, His ministry includes you. Not only because it gave you everything needed in a bleeding and dying King. But also because God works that work of Salvation in the very words you share with your neighbor when you say, "Jesus loves you." And when you say it, know that He loves you too – no matter what. The headlines promise it. Because you know that best headline of all, "*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.*" God loves you. Never doubt that, beloved in the Lord. Just look in the river. There He is, ready to be the greatest Servant King ever known. And a Servant King He was. How else would He be able to take every one of your sins to the cross? By serving you and being the King of kings at the same time. Thanks be to God. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.