

Pastor B.J. Froiland
3rd Sunday after Christmas
Matthew 3:13-17
January 10th, 2010

Sermon for the Baptism of Our Lord

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Martin Luther clearly defines Holy Baptism as “not just plain water, but it is the water included in God’s command and combined with God’s word.” Holy Baptism is water and God’s Word, but what does it do? Luther would go on to say that, “It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this...” One can easily see how great benefit comes from Holy Baptism. King David said in Ps. 53, “Everyone of them is gone back; they have all together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no not one.” He speaks of us all. Yet, in this washing of water and the Word, all of the sins that you have committed and ever will commit are taken away. Death will not have the last word and the devil has lost the war when one receives Holy Baptism. The doors of heaven are opened to you and you have eternal life.

Holy Baptism is great – for sinners. But today we celebrate the Baptism of Him who is without sin. How can sin be taken away from a Man in whom there is no sin? How could death and the devil trouble Him who has defeated both of these foes? How could the doors of heaven and eternal life be opened to Him who unlocked paradise by His Resurrection? Allow me to sum up these inquiries into one question: Why did Jesus need to be baptized?

John the Baptizer asks the same thing to Jesus: “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” It is as if John were saying, “I am the sinner, and you are the sinless One. What need do you have of Baptism? You are the source of forgiveness!” John the Baptizer knew something about repentance and forgiveness. Through the preaching of the Gospel, John directed repentant sinners to trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. The people who came out to John and received his preaching confessed their sins and were baptized for the forgiveness of sins in the Jordan River. John’s Baptism worked forgiveness of sins. He made it clear that the source of that forgiveness was Christ.

But just how is Christ the source of forgiveness? How does He win forgiveness for sinful man? Jesus becomes the sinner for you. The apostle Paul declares, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them...For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Christ became the greatest

thief, murderer, robber, desecrater, blasphemer, and liar – yes, the greatest sinner that there has ever been anywhere in the world.

In His Baptism, Jesus unites Himself with sinful man. He aligns Himself with you and takes your sin into His flesh. He assumes the responsibility for the sin of the world, that He might make atonement for sin, according to the Law, in His death upon the cross. Jesus' Baptism designates Him our sin-bearer – the very Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world by offering up His life in death on our behalf. Jesus fulfills the Law of God and all righteousness on our behalf, by suffering the punishment and death demanded by the Law. His death makes restitution for the sin of the world. Whoever is baptized is no longer his or her own person. This includes Jesus. In His baptism He gave up all His advantages as God and became like you. Your weaknesses, your anxieties, your fears, and your sins become His.

Jesus becomes one with you. He takes on all that has gone wrong with you – all your sins. Jesus is most sinner. Jesus is most Savior. With that sin, He belongs with you. With that salvation, you belong to Him. There is no distance, no separation between you and Christ. That is how God decided His judgment and His righteousness to go. Now there's no necessary separation to keep God holy. Jesus seized His opportunity to fulfill all righteousness and be together with you.

For all Christ did and for all He was, the Father was pleased with Him, even as He said, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased." Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, is the saving content of Holy Baptism.

The delight and pleasure of God are in His beloved Son, and that is where you are, too. What is yours is His, what is His is yours. Your sin is His. His righteousness is yours. When Christ is Baptized, He takes on what you are and gives you what He has. The Righteous One who fulfills all righteousness has done it for you. So God delights in you, too. Luther said that if your heart would take this in, it would burst with joy into a thousand pieces. In a world that is given over to sin, death, and the devil, there is one point where the delight of God dwells. "This is my Beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." In Holy Baptism, it's the same for you. "This is my beloved son; this is my beloved daughter in whom I am well pleased." God has put these words on you, too, with water and His name. Because Christ is the beloved Son, you are beloved sons and daughters with Him.

Being a son and daughter of the Lord, also called The Christian life, is visible only to the Lord. One cannot "see" the Christian life except by external

signs which the Lord works. He works through water and Word, *as you witnessed today*. You see the water. All that the mortal eye beholds is water as we pour it. But you would be mistaken to end there, because before the eye of faith unfolds the power of Jesus' merit. The work He did comes to you in this Sacrament, for here the eye of faith sees the crimson flood that brings healing to all our ills. The wonders of Christ's precious Blood reveal the love of God and assure us of His pardon of our sins. So also in the waters of Holy Baptism you see this same forgiveness by His Blood.

Baptism is not one isolated moment in infancy, but it's the very reality in which you're now living and in which you'll die. When Luther was afflicted by sin, he wouldn't cry out, "I was baptized," but "*I am* baptized." Our worship always begins "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" only because you're baptized. Baptism creates the church, and baptism is the reality in which the church lives. Baptism is absolutely certain, because it depends on God and not us. If anyone says your Baptism is of no value and that you must be baptized again, you answer, "I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins."

Why did Christ need to be baptized? Because in His baptism, the blessed realities of your own baptism are revealed, and today newly revealed for Tristen. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are truly present in your Baptism, in your Baptisms. The Father speaks His Words of divine approval upon you for His Son's sake. The water of Holy Baptism washes your sins away and gives Christ's righteousness in exchange. The Holy Spirit bestows on you the new life of faith. Today the doors of hell are shut and the gates of heaven are open for you. Amen.

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

✠BJF✠