

Lectionary Readings: Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Romans 6:1-11; Mark 1:4-11

Sermon Title: *Joined to Jesus*

Prayer: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, [our] Rock and [our] Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

Salutation: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

Text: The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit comes to stir our hearts for the Baptism of Our Lord is from our Gospel Reading: The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the first chapter.

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ, every year, the season of Epiphany begins with the account of the magi visiting the Christ child as told in Matthew. The Sunday following the Epiphany looks to the Baptism of Jesus. This year it's Mark's turn to teach us something about the Baptism of our Lord.

I. We consider the Baptism of Jesus as a major milestone in the ministry of Jesus. As we consider the Baptism of Jesus, the evangelist Mark tells us in our Gospel Reading that the heavens were torn open and the Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove. It also tells of the voice of the Father saying: "*You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased*" (v 11).

Thus, this is an epiphany of the entire Trinity. We see that while it is the Son of God Who takes on our human flesh in order to redeem us, it is the entire Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – Who are involved in our redemption.

The fact that the heavens were torn open tells us that the heavens were closed. The word torn also indicates the eagerness of the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – to bring heaven down to us. That is to unite heaven and earth to heal our relationship with Him.

Too, this epiphany of the Triune God also shows us the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the Triune God. So, when the Father says, "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased,*" this is a statement that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit relate to one another in love. The Apostle John states in his first epistle: "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8, 16).

This love also indicates the reason heaven was closed in the first place. The Apostle John also wrote this about love: "*Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love*" (1 John 4:8).

You see, God is a God of love and we have rejected that love on many different levels. God's law tells us that children must honor their parents. It also tells us that a wife is to love her husband, and brother is to show respect to his sister.

When we rejected God, we also rejected these God-pleasing relations within the family:

- Children, even at a very young age, disobey their parents.
- A wife covets her neighbor's husband, and a husband has an illicit relationship with a woman who is not his wife.
- Sisters and brothers fight as children, and as adults they harbor animosity and resentment for one another.

Even worse, the intimate loving relationship we see within the epiphany of the Triune God reminds us that our love toward God has grown cold. The Law states: "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Nevertheless, we look for love from the gods of our own making. Very often the god we worship is the one we see in the mirror. It is our pleasure – our wants – our desires that are at the center of our lives.

However, God desires our relationship with Him to be like the relationship between a bride and a groom. But we often commit spiritual adultery and pursue the gods of our own desires.

II. So, as we observe the Baptism of Jesus today, Baptism reveals the plan of God:

- To restore this love.
- To heal our relationship with Him.
- To open heaven to us once again.

In today's *epistle* the Apostle Paul tells us that in Baptism we are united to Christ. He states:

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by Baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4).

You see, Jesus standing in the water of Baptism joins Him to us and us to Him:

- It means that everything He does, He does in our place.
- It means that everything He does, He does for me and He does for you.

All of this is because of Jesus' undying love for you:

- In His love for you, He left His throne above and was conceived in the womb of the Virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- In His love for you, He was born into the poverty of Bethlehem.
- In His love for you, He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered, died, and was buried.
- In His love for you, He rose from the dead and ascended to His Father in heaven.

Thus, through Baptism, everything Jesus did, He did for you.

III. Therefore in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, you are born again into a new family:

- All who are baptized are precious children of God and brothers and sisters of Jesus.
- Old family ties are cut and dissolved, while new ones are formed.
- Human parents are replaced with a heavenly Father, and a brother who is both divine and human takes the place of human siblings.
- In the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, your past familial failures on earth are cast aside as you are brought into a heavenly family.

However, there are even more benefits of Baptism. The joining of baptism also means that, just as the Holy Spirit came on Jesus as a dove, He also comes on you. Thus, the joining of baptism means that just as the Father spoke to Jesus and said, "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased,*" He also spoke to you at your baptism and said, "*You are my beloved son – You are my beloved daughter; with you I am well pleased.*"

You see, when the pastor applied water to you and said the divine words "*I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*" God tore the heavens apart. In this tearing of the heavens apart, He identified Himself as your heavenly Father and you as His sons and daughters, and consequently brothers and sisters of His Son, Jesus.

Moreover, at the Baptism of Jesus that yet future event, the full reconciliation of the cross, became yours. Therefore:

- The sin against God, against husband, wife, brother, sister, child, which separated you from each of them, was forgiven.
- You were with God and with them once again.
- And when your heavenly Father anointed you with the Holy Spirit in that same glorious moment of your Baptism, all doubts were dashed: you are sons and daughters of God.

Therefore, through Baptism there is one great family in Christ as the Apostle Paul states:

“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

This family spans the globe. For it includes all believers on every continent, and every island all over the world. This family even transcends time and space for it includes all who believe in Jesus here and in eternity.

To the eye of those outside the church, Baptism looks like pretty ordinary stuff. All they see is someone applying water to someone else. How gracious it is of God to use the ordinary to do the extraordinary.

For, in baptism, the word of God is applied to the water according to the command of God. Baptism then becomes a means that the Holy Spirit uses to transport forgiveness into the life of the Christian.

Jesus earned that forgiveness for us outside of Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago. The Holy Spirit uses Holy Baptism to transport that forgiveness over thousands of miles and thousands of years so that it pours over us with the water.

Conclusion: Dear friends in Christ, the account of Jesus’ Baptism reminds us that through Baptism we are joined to Him and He is joined to us so that He is our brother, and His heavenly Father is also our Heavenly Father. That: IN JESUS’ BAPTISM, THE BAPTIZED ARE MADE CHILDREN OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER.

In the name of ✠ Jesus, Who forgives all your sins. Amen.

To God alone the Glory!