

Rev. Danny Mackey  
The Baptism of Our Lord  
January 13, 2019  
Matthew 3:13-17  
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.*

Does that seem strange to you? That Jesus would come to Galilee to be baptized by John? It most certainly seemed strange to John. The sinless Son of God comes to receive a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin at the hands of a sinner. That's like a doctor telling the patient to heal him. From what did Jesus have to repent? Of what did Jesus need to be forgiven? He has no sin to confess, and yet He stands before God, shoulder to shoulder with all sorts of sinners to be baptized.

John objected. This wasn't the plan he had in mind for cousin Jesus. He pictured Jesus strong and mighty, coming with a baptism of fire, with an axe in one hand and a pitchfork in the other. A messiah who was going to clean up the threshing floor, gather the good stuff into His barn, and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.

And now Jesus shows up at the banks of the Jordan, not to sort the wheat from the chaff or to punish sinners, but to join them in John's baptism! The two men stand facing each other. They were cousins by birth. One the son of an old woman named Elizabeth and an old priest named Zechariah; the other the son of a virgin mother, whose Father is God. One grew up in the wilderness, the other in Nazareth. One wore camel's hair and leather and ate wild honey and grasshoppers; the other you probably couldn't tell from any other 30-year-old man from Nazareth. John looked deep into Jesus' eyes. His voice shook as he whispered, "I should be baptized by You. I'm the sinner, You're the sinless One. I'm baptizing people to prepare them for You. And You come to me to be baptized? This doesn't make any sense."

But Jesus insists. "Let it be, John." That's the forgiveness word, by the way. "Let it go. Let go any notion about how you think I'm going to work because you ain't seen nothing yet. This is the way, John. This is proper for us to do to fulfill all righteousness."

This is a picture of how God saves the world. The sinless Son of God becomes the world's sin. He stands in the water of John's baptism alongside sinners of every sort—hookers, homosexuals, drunkards, drug addicts, cheats, liars, gossips, murderers, thieves, terrorists, corrupt businessmen and clergy and tax collectors. And your basic run of the mill

sinners, and religious sinners, and polite sinners. He becomes the world's sin. He embodies all of humanity, a second Adam, and He embodies the world's sin in His sinlessness. He's the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, and He takes away the world's sin by taking it all into His dark death.

St. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians: "God made Christ sin for us, who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." Now I don't know if you can recognize a good deal when you see one, but this is a good deal. Christ becomes our sin, He embodies our sin in His own body, baptized in the Jordan, crucified on Calvary. And we, in Him, become His righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

You might say that when Jesus was baptized, the whole world was baptized in Him just as when Jesus died, St. Paul says that the whole world died in Him. If Jesus embodies the world in His body as the second Adam, the new head of humanity, then His Baptism is the world's Baptism. It's like the Flood, where God baptized the whole world in a flood of water and saved a representative part of creation, Noah and his family and the animals, as a kind of "new creation." Or it's like the creation, when God made the heavens and the earth, and the earth was formless and void, and the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. And God spoke His Word into this watery world in the Spirit, and there was light and land and plants and animals and man—a creation by water and Word and the Spirit.

In Jesus' baptism, we see the same thing all over again, but now with the Son of God, the creative Word in the Flesh Himself standing in the water, and the Father's voice speaking from heaven, and the Spirit descending visibly in the likeness of a dove. At that moment, a new creation was unveiled, a new humanity in Christ. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit made all things new in the Son Jesus the Christ, the Savior of the world.

Now, if you're paying attention, you're probably asking this question: If the whole world is baptized in the baptism of Christ, why bother being baptized? Let me ask you a question. Which is more meaningful to you? A form letter addressed "To whom it may concern" or a handwritten letter signed by the author delivered in person with your name on it? Which would you rather have from God? A form letter that says, "To whom it may concern, Christ died for you and took away your sins." Or a personal letter, signed by the Father, sealed by the Spirit, written by the Son, on watermarked, fancy stationery no less, that says, "I died

for you, and took away your sins and now you're safe in my death." I don't know about you, but when it comes to confidence, I'll take the handwritten note any day.

Baptism is a personal letter from the Triune God addressed to you, in your time and in your place. Christ saved you in His death, and Baptism now saves you by revealing that death to you personally. In Christ, you were reborn, and Baptism now marks you as one of God's children. You are eternally loved in the Beloved Son, you are elect in the Elect Son. And Baptism makes this known to you in your time and place. Now.

I was an infant when I was baptized. I don't remember it. I have a certificate and maybe a snapshot to prove it, but that's about it. But the wonderful thing about it is that I do not have a conscious moment, not a single day, when I did not know Jesus Christ as my Savior. I know that doesn't make much of a testimonial, but God's testimony is so much better than mine. That's the beautiful thing about Baptism. It's God's testimony to you, personally delivered.

Through Baptism, the heavenly Father says to you, "You belong. You're mine. Nothing can take you away from me. I saved you in the death of my Son Jesus, and now, here and now, in this time and in this place, I am making it known to you personally. You are died for. Your sins are forgiven. Your life is hid in Christ."

Apostle Paul calls Baptism a burial. He says, "Don't you know (implying, of course, that you do know!) that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through Baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." We were buried with Christ into His death. We've been crucified with Christ in His crucifixion. We're dead. And the only thing you can do with the dead is give them a decent burial. And what more decent burial than to bury them into the one Death that brings life?

Your whole sinful nature together with all your sin is crucified and buried with Christ. In Baptism you have a new identity, a new way of looking at yourselves. Not sinner, but saint, child of God. St. Paul says, "Consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." In yourselves you are dead. But in Christ Jesus, you are alive as alive can be. You are baptized. That's who you are. You are a baptized child of God. Don't forget it, remind yourself of it each and every day and live that way. That's what the sign of the cross is supposed to be about. "I am baptized. I know who I am and whose I am."

What a wonderful way to live! Dead to self but alive to God in Christ. We worry so much about dying. Yet we're already dead as far as God is concerned. Dead in trespasses and sin. Born dead in Adam's death. And crucified with Christ. We're dead, as far as God is concerned, and the beauty of being dead is that we have nothing to lose. When you go home from Church this morning, you get to go as one who is dead to sin but alive to God in Christ. And if you get in a car accident and die, you don't lose a thing, including your life, because your life is held by Jesus in Himself. That's what Baptism tells us. You're in, you're home, you're safe in the death of Jesus.

Evangelist Matthew reports that when Jesus was baptized, the heavens opened wide, and the Spirit of God descended like a dove, and the voice of the Father spoke and said, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." Jesus was the beloved Son from all eternity. He was the Christ from all eternity. The Spirit rests upon Him from all eternity. Yet here in this time and in this place God sacramentalizes it—He makes it visible, audible, tangible, for all the world to see.

And so with you in your Baptism. Heaven is opened. The Spirit descends upon you. The Father smiles approvingly, "This is my beloved son, my beloved daughter." Beloved in the beloved Son Jesus. You are reborn, renewed, resurrected. Here and now. You are baptized. All thanks to Jesus.

In His name.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your heart and mind in + Christ Jesus.