

**The Baptism of Our Lord: January 13, 2019**  
**“Problematic Mixing”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is our Old Testament lesson, Isaiah 42, especially these words, **“Isaiah 42:1-3.”**

As we observe the Baptism of our Lord, what words to recall. “Behold.” That is, “Perk up and pay attention.” In this context of Isaiah, God is in the middle of a courtroom scene. In the chapter before, God has brought to light the utter foolishness and futility of idols. There is a great contrast being made between the One True God, and all of the other things that are being worshipped as gods. After Isaiah 41, the expectation is that the nations, and those who worship idols, those who follow false gods, will get the justice they deserve; that is, judgment of eternal damnation.

One of the tasks of Israel was to announce Yahweh’s strict and right judgment against idolatry. They were to be a light to the Gentiles around them. They were to be a shining beacon of hope and salvation for all men, as they were the chosen nation of the One True God. God dwelt with them by providing the means by which His Word would be heard and proclaimed, and His mercy would be delivered. God’s House was located within their borders, and His mercy seat was in their midst. Idols cannot save. Wood and stone are worthless dead things. Yahweh was the living God. He was the creator of the heavens and the earth. He gives breath to the people who walk on it. Israel was to shine that truth, and draw the Gentiles like moths to a flame.

However, they did not. They were weary, and rebellious. They sought to be just like the nations around them. Rather than hearing from, adhering to, and proclaiming the truths of the One True God, they sought to blend the words of God with the gods around them. Israel, like Egypt and Babylon, became tolerant of other gods, and accommodating to the practices of their service. Rather than worshipping God the way He designed, they blended with the culture around them. One example is brought out in verse 2. The god Marduk was worshipped by carrying around statues of him, and crying or singing loud ritual shouts.

To better understand Israel’s situation, you must understand Babylon. The very name Babylon itself means, “Gate of gods.” The city had eight gates, each one named after a

god. Jeremiah describes it as a “*land of images, and they are mad over idols.*”<sup>1</sup> At the very heart of the religious system was myth, magic, exorcism, fortune-telling, and divination. They would often employ the use of animal intestines to predict the future. The goal of the worshippers was for the gods to grant fertile lands or wombs, prosperity or riches, and of course victory over enemies great and small. In order to do that, one had to avoid provoking the gods to anger, which was rather difficult when the gods were fickle, erratic, and impulsive. The gods did not care about right and wrong, they were concerned mainly with order. Worship of the gods dealt mainly with sexuality and/or violence to the body, so prostitution, orgies, homosexuality, and ritual killings, of even humans, was common place.

I think we could put the best construction on everything and say the Israelites were trying to be neighborly. They didn't want to create waves, or cause too much of a commotion, so they quietly did their thing. What we see is the more the Israelites worshipped violent and lustful gods, the more they reflected this life of hatred and abuse. It was the slippery slopes of all slippery slopes. They began to see how the other gods were being worshipped, and wondered why their God was not receiving the same. There was more show to it. It was loud, and in your face, and boy it looked cool. To not do it, seemed odd. So maybe, I could worship my God, but using their practices. I know what it is in my heart, I know what I believe, so I will just do their actions, and in my heart I will know the difference.

It is true, you are what you eat. The more mixing they did, the more they lost the true God. By their words and actions, they were not only putting other gods on the same level as Yahweh, but they were teaching others to do the same. Even if they could truly, in their hearts remain true, what were they showing their pagan neighbors, and teaching their children? The enticements of idols and false gods is appealing to our sinful nature. We understand punishment and anger, and so we get how certain actions may anger a god. If my god can get angry about what I hate, then that gives me the right to get angry. If my god can be erratic and impulsive, that justifies me to do the same. If my god can be worshipped using my body in ways that I already want to use it, well then, why not. My body is just a body. It has hormones and impulses, should I not act on them?

See this is the world in which we live. Daily on the news, there is ritualistic shouting for all sorts of false gods. Signs and statues are carried, songs are sung, and many of these

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 50:38

even claim to be worshipping the One True God. Many disgraceful actions and shameful words are falsely claimed to be sanctioned by God. As the blending of the gods in the culture around us continues, many have sought to change the everlasting Word of God Himself, especially in things that have to do with the body, abortion, euthanasia, self-harm, body modification, homosexuality, pre-marriage relations, adultery, cohabitation, property rights, free speech, the idea of worship, and any other item I want to change to feel a bit better about myself, seems to get twisted right out of the Bible, so that the Bible justifies what I already want to do. Christianity gets turned into something that simply makes me feel better about what I already want to do; no muss, no fuss, no coconuts.

To be fair, not too many set off with the idea of wanting to change God's Word right away. It starts with not wanting to look strange, or not wanting to cause a scene, or wanting to reach more people, or not wanting to offend. The trouble is, the more you want to look like the gods around you, the more you will act like the gods around you. We are called to be holy, and when we mix our words, our lives, our worship with other gods, it leads us to act like pagans.

This is why we must ever be diligent in our worship. When we attend other churches, even with the name Christian or Lutheran, it does not necessarily mean we worship the same God. How many groups have Lutheran in their name, and have changed God's Word to fit their own interpretations? How many groups that have Christian in their name seek to look and act like the culture around them? How many, sadly even within our own church body, have abandoned God's truth for a lie, and with a lack of accountability, have reflected a life of hatred towards God's Word and abuse of His very Sacraments. The Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper belong to Him. He has given them to His Church. They are not for us to change or toy around with; they are gifts given to be cherished, nurtured, and adored.

Among the temptation to blend idols, Jesus did none of it. He is the chosen One of God, upheld by the very power of the Word, as He is the Word Himself. He is the one in whom the very being of God delights. At Jesus' baptism, we see the Spirit of God rest upon Him, as it comes from heaven in bodily form like a dove, and we hear the voice of God proclaim, "***You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.***"<sup>2</sup> Even when holding to and proclaiming the truth of God's Word was hard and uncomfortable, Jesus spoke only one truth and worshipped only one God. Jesus was tempted to mix in other

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 3:22

practices, and mix in other words, just like you. He lived in a culture that was open to any gods, as long as one did not make claim to be the only God. Israel had blended the tolerance of Rome and the worship of the Roman gods right along with Yahweh. The Pharisees had long taught God to be one who could be appeased with the right words and works. No longer was the issue, “Be holy, for I the Lord Your God am holy”; rather, the issue was don’t be set apart, be common like Rome. Worship, but don’t cause a scene.

Jesus certainly was tempted with that, and we know His family tried to get Him to be silent. As Jesus shined light on each idol, including those built by the Pharisees, it created anger and plots to end His life. He brought the true Light to the world. He shined that pure light, and brought justice to the nations, and would lay down His life at the hands of those who were entrusted to be the swords of justice on earth. The sinless one was drug in front of the judgement seat and was declared guilty of all the world’s sin. In a swift act of justice, God’s Servant suffered at the hands of men, and died for you, so that you would no longer be slaves of sin, servants of Satan, and captives of death. The Servant of God was lifted high on the cross and laid down His entire being, for you. Paying for your sin. Redeeming you from Satan. Liberating you from eternal death.

Through the mercy of God, His justice is brought to you His children. You are no longer slaves, but sons and daughters of the King, heirs of life eternal. This God is not like Marduk. He does not need your thoughts and ideas on how best to worship or serve Him. He will not cry of lift up His voice. He did not do it when He was before the Sanhedrin, nor in front of Pilate. He continues the same practice today. Marduk required his followers to carry his statues and shout ritual babblings over and over, loudly in the streets so that all would know of this god. He required a big show, and this would give his people something to which they could grasp and feel they are truly doing something for god. In effort to serve God, they aimed to please themselves.

God works the opposite way. To serve God, is to please your neighbor. To serve God is to serve your neighbor. In fact, God is not worshipped out there, loudly in the streets, God is worshipped here. He locates His gracious presence for you. The point of coming here, to this place Sunday after Sunday, is for Him to feed you. As I have said it many times before, this is not about you, it is for you. Even the service of baptisms, weddings, and funerals are not about you. They are for you. They are about Christ and Him crucified. They are not times to blend God with our own ideas, thoughts, and feelings. They are times to be served, fed, strengthened, nourished, and comforted by God. Here

He serves you. Jesus' baptism made Him just like one of us. He was baptized into our death, and our baptism brings us into His death. He takes our sin, we get His life. The same Word spoken at creation, here speaks life to dead in sin sinners.

To those who follow dead idols of wood and stone, empty philosophies and selfish bodies, justice will be meted out. To those who follow the One True God, even the bruised and faint will be lifted up. He executes patience with those whose consciences are tormented by Satan. As the true physician, Christ is the only one who can provide healing. Even those who are difficult, irritable, suspicious and troublesome, in the body of Christ, they find relief. While we don't mix idols, we do mix personalities. Your brother in Christ may be a miserable shrew or a heavy hitting battle-ax, but you belong to one body with one head who died for both of you. Christ wishes to blend you together, uniting you through His blood in the waters of Holy Baptism, and together you drink from the one cup that covers all your sin.

Christian friendship is different than the world, because Christians are to bear one another's burdens in love. As you serve God, by serving your neighbor, it may be that you get stepped on, and your neighbor becomes better off and stronger. Your only reaction must be, "Thanks be to God. What great blessing has come upon them."

Outside of Christ, there is nothing but sin. Apart from Christ, one will only find service aimed at the self. In Christ, we see the opposite. As you live ever connected to Christ, joined into His Body through Baptism, ever connected to the vine and fed on His Word and Sacrament, you are restored to the reality of One God, no idols, where you live as Him, not as the nations around you. He has put His Spirit upon you, and through Jesus looks at you and says, "You are my chosen ones, in whom my soul delights. Eternal life is yours, through my Son. Through Him, you have pleased me."

While the world looks for a big show, none will be given. While our eyes long to mix the practices of the culture around us in effort to bring more so-called feeling to this day, by faith, there is nothing greater than a bit of water, a crust of bread, a dash of wine, and the pure Word of God.

"All that the mortal eye beholds  
Is water as we pour it.  
Before the eye of faith unfolds  
The pow'r of Jesus' merit.

For here it sees the crimson flood  
To all our ills bring healing;  
The wonders of His precious blood  
The love of God revealing,  
Assuring His own pardon.”<sup>3</sup> Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in  
Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> To Jordan Came the Christ Our Lord LSB 406:7

**Prayer of the Church**  
**The Baptism of Our Lord**  
**13 January 2019**

Created in Your image, formed for Your glory, called by Your name and washed clean in Baptism, we come this day as the people of Your promise with the intercessions and prayers for all people as they have need.

Blessed Lord, You wonderfully foreshadowed the promise of Baptism in the rescue of Noah from the flood, in the passing of Your people through the Red Sea, and in the ceremonial washings of Your law. In Christ and by His Baptism, You have kept Your Word and made Baptism to be the water of new life. Give us Your Holy Spirit, that we may become the new and holy people You have declared us to be. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, the nations still live in darkness and in the despair of death. Raise up prophets who will address them with Your Word and truth, and accompany this preaching with Your Holy Spirit so that those who hear may believe. Bring to a good end all the mission work, through our own congregation here, in our district and in every place where our Synod is at work to share the Gospel. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, bless Your Church; Matthew, our Synod president; Brian, our district president; Sam, our circuit visitor; and all church workers. Make them wise unto salvation and faithful in all the duties and responsibilities assigned to them for our benefit. Bless also those preparing for church work vocations. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of all power, all the might of man is nothing before You. We pray You to place Your blessing on all those who serve Your people in government, the police, firefighters, emergency medical personnel, disaster relief and the armed forces. Give them good and honest hearts for their service, and lead them by Your Word to know and do what is good and right for all people and in accordance with Your will. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of compassion and mercy, no suffering passes before You unnoticed. Give to the sick, those hospitalized, those recuperating from illness, those in treatment and those troubled in mind and heart both Your healing presence and Your healing peace. Especially hear us on behalf of *Larry, Carmen, Susan* and those now named in our hearts. (Brief silence.) Be their companion in solitude, their healing in affliction, their deliverer from trouble and their life in death. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we come, as Your Son has bidden us, to receive at this altar His gift of His flesh for the life of the world and His blood as the cup of our salvation. Help us to commune this day in good conscience, discerning Christ's body and blood and repenting of our sins, that we may keep in faithful hearts and with holy lives what we receive upon our lips this day. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, our times are in Your hands. Look with favor, we pray, on Your servants *Darlo & Joel* whom You have granted another year of earthly life. Grant that *they* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *their* trust in Your goodness all the days of *their* life; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Eternal God, You have made us Your own people by Baptism and granted us Your Holy Spirit to confess Christ in words and in works. We remember with thanksgiving all those who went before us with the sign of faith, who passed on to us the sign of faith and who now rest in Christ from all their labors, comfort those who mourn the death of Evelyn, mother of our District President Brian. Make us as faithful in our own time, and keep us faithful to the baptismal covenant in which we died with Christ so that we may be raised with Christ in perfect freedom to live ever, only, all for You. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O almighty and everlasting God, do we commend all for whom we pray this day, trusting in Your mercy, through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom be glory now and forever. **Amen.**