Baptism of Our Lord

Matthew 3:13-17

*God joins us to Jesus in Baptism*

Why did Jesus the Son of God need to be baptized? Hebrews tells us that Jesus was like us in all ways except that he did not sin, and so the church teaches that Jesus never sinned because if he had then he would be unable to save us from our sins.

Yet today we hear in the Gospel according to St. Matthew that Jesus went and was baptized by John the Baptist. Jesus comes to the Jordan where John has been preaching about repentance and obeying God, and then he has been baptizing people in the river Jordan.

John’s baptism was different than the traditional water purification rituals done in the Judaism of Jesus day, because this was a one-time event rather that something done every time someone became unclean from sin. John’s baptism was also different than the sacrament of Baptism observed by the church today.

Many people have been responding to John’s message of repentance and coming to be baptized as they await the coming Messiah. Now Jesus comes and seeks baptism from John who at first flat out refuses.

John protests to Jesus that in fact things should be the other way around Jesus should be the one baptizing him, but Jesus insists saying that he needs to be baptized by John to fulfill all righteousness. In other words, Jesus needs to be baptized by John to fulfill God’s will.

Yet why did Jesus get baptized if he did not need it? The answer is that Jesus did not need a baptism of forgiveness because Jesus had nothing to be forgiven for, and so it was not for Jesus sake that he was baptized but for our sake.

The Gospel of Matthew makes it clear from the beginning that Jesus is the Son of God by the miraculous virgin conception of his mother Mary by the Holy Spirit. Now as an adult Jesus prepares to begin his mission in the world, and at his baptism Jesus willingly chooses to be joined together with sinners.

Jesus was born to save people from their sins and by being baptized Jesus visibly identifies with them and this is what God desired and God’s Son willingly obeyed.

The good news goes further than just Jesus choosing to identify with sinners. We celebrate that in the sacrament of Holy Baptism Jesus not only identifies with the person baptized, but freely out of love gives them amazing gifts.

It is in baptism that a person becomes a child of God, that a person becomes an adopted brother or sister of Jesus himself and becomes part of Jesus body: the church, that a person is washed clean of the sinful selfish human nature and freed to live for others, and that a person is given the promise and hope of the bodily resurrection to come.

Though Jesus never sinned and had no need to be baptized Jesus lovingly obeyed God and was baptized for the sake of sinners including us. Holy Baptism is an amazing, life changing, holy gift that is given to us by God who joins us to God’s only Son Jesus out of pure love.

Baptism matters and it’s the good news that our world needs to hear. Our world is fiercely divided along political lines, along theological lines, along economic lines, along racial lines, etc. And to this here is the message of Jesus being baptized and calling us to baptism so that we can be joined together instead of apart.

Baptism matters because many people believe they are unlovable or that they can’t possibly be forgiven by God for their sins and wrongdoing. Yet here is the story of Jesus baptism where he is not ashamed to be identified with broken sinners but willingly goes to be baptized to publicly demonstrate this. Jesus then demonstrates when a person is baptized that he is not ashamed of them and they are deeply loved and forgiven by God.

Baptism matters because people are seeking an identity, somewhere to belong, and guidance on how to live in our world. In baptism we are given our identity as children of God, adopted siblings of Jesus, members of Jesus body: the church, and we are given the Holy Spirit and a faith community to help and guide us as we seek to grown and live our lives as disciples of Jesus.

Baptism matters because death is scary for us and in baptism we are given the hope that if we are joined to Jesus life and death we will also be joined to his bodily resurrection, and so death does not need to scare us because it is not the end for us.

Baptism matters because it is a life changing pure gift of unconditional love given to us by God so that we can be who we are meant to be children of God proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ in our world.

Jesus went to the Jordan river to be baptized by John. Though John did not understand at first Jesus was willingly obeying the will of God to prove that God loves us, God is not ashamed to be our God, and that God publicly chooses to be identified with the brokenness of humanity.

In the gift of the sacrament of Baptism God continues to pour out that love by turning us into God’s children, making us adopted heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven through Jesus our brother, forgiving our sins, giving us a community of faith to be with, and giving us the hope of the bodily resurrection to come.

What an amazing gift of pure love given to us by God through Jesus. Jesus was baptized to show the world how much he loves and cares for us, and Jesus calls all people to baptism to be joined to him and receive the incredible love and gifts God desires for us. Amen.