

Rev. Kurt Cockran, Risen Savior Lutheran Church (Basehor, KS), C – Baptism of our Lord,
January 9th, 2022

Baptized to Die and Rise

Luke 3:15-22

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,

Here he is yet again – John the Baptist. No longer Advent, but still relevant. In Advent we focus more on John’s identity as the prophesied forerunner to the Christ, as well as the preparatory message of John: Repent. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Repent. But now, we get the second half of Luke’s retelling of John the Baptist: the forerunning Baptism, leading into the Baptism of our Lord.

And this fits in well with the changing of the church year seasons. Christmas is about the incarnated Son of God *hiding* his divinity in the lowliness of his humanity. Epiphany is now when we turn our attention to uncovering that long-prophesied Messiah now in the flesh. Now in this season of Epiphany is when Christ must increase while John must decrease.

Epiphany means to have a moment of realization of something profound. In literature, the word “epiphany” refers to suddenly seeing the significance in the experiences of ordinary life. Baptism was ordinary. It comes from the word *baptizo*, which simply means to *wash* (typically with water). If you were speaking Greek in the ancient world and were letting you wife know you were about to go clean-up for dinner, you would say that you were going to go *baptizo* your hands. Washing with water was about as ordinary as it gets, even today. How, then, can the waters of Baptism do such great things? Because the Eternal Word of God made flesh stepped into the waters of the Jordan to be baptized and thus sanctified and instituted all Baptismal waters for us to be a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the Holy Spirit. The ordinary becomes extraordinary. What began as an ordinary baptism in the Jordan by the prophet John became the extraordinary opening of the heavens, “**And the Holy Spirit descended in**

bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.”

The Baptism of Jesus can sometimes take us off guard, and though we didn't get the detail in our Luke reading, it does come out in Matthew, where it takes John off guard as well. “I should be baptized by *you!*” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting – it is *necessary* – for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

Very well, and John consented. It...was...necessary. That Jesus had to get down in the water of a sinner's baptism and be treated *like* a penitent sinner, it was necessary. That He became one with us, with all of humanity, in our sin. He assumed the filth of our rebellion onto himself. He took a bath in our bathwater. He became Sin for us, who knew no sin. He didn't simply bear our sins, but *became* our Sin.

While it's true: this event has its marks of glory and exaltation (that Father's voice, the fact that this is akin to a coronation ceremony, etc.) but hidden behind this story is the truly good reality of what's to come to this assumer of our sin.

There's no crown for Jesus at this coronation, because the crown for this king will be the crown of thorns. The cross is His glory. When the voice of the Father testifies aloud his favor in His Son, this is foreshadowing three years later when Jesus shall cry out on the cross “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani...My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” but the Lord Almighty will be silent and not turn away His wrath.

Jesus' ministry begins where He stands in solidarity with sinners, elbow to elbow in the same bath water as prostitutes, tax collectors, and all manner of religious rejects; His work ends on the cross where He hangs in solidarity with thieves, promising the faithful one Paradise. His

work begins with water; His work ends with water and blood flowing from His side. At His baptism, the heavens are opened to Him; at His cross the heavens are opened to sinners.

This then opens up to us the fullness of Christian baptism. All that belonged to Christ when He stepped into the waters is given to you. At your Baptism, the kingdom of heaven is opened to you as the Spirit descends to dwell within you. The Holy Spirit is good at using water to create, for even before God said “let there be light,” the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. In Baptism, the Spirit hovers over the waters to *re*-create you. And just as the voice of the Father came from heaven and spoke the blessing upon Jesus: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased,” so too does the Father speak this upon you in your Baptism. This one is now my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, for He is now united to my beloved Son Jesus.

But Baptism doesn't just unite you to the events of Jesus' Baptism, but also to the Baptism of blood in Jesus' death. Baptism buries us in the death of Jesus. The baptismal font is the tomb in which we are buried with Christ. In His Baptism, Jesus joined Himself to us in our death; in our Baptism we are joined to Jesus in His death. But that grave of the Baptismal font is the same as Jesus' grave. It couldn't hold him, so it doesn't hold the one passing through the waters. The baptism with which Jesus is baptized is not merely his death, but also his glorious resurrection – now by faith, and in the end by sight. Having been put to death in the waters and given new life, you dear Saints have now nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Having been put to death with Christ, you yourself no longer live to yourself, but instead to Christ who lives in you. So as one baptized, consider yourself dead to sin and yet alive to God in Christ Jesus. As Jesus was promptly taken by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted, you too face your own life of temptations, yet you always have the Spirit and the angels attending

you. This gift of your Baptism *isn't* so that you would keep on sinning so that grace may abound. Jesus never said “don't worry about your sin” or “don't feel too bad about your sin” or “don't sweat it.” Jesus doesn't want you to be comfortable with your sin, but instead directs you to have your baptism kill your sin, to drown your Old Adam. So that you wouldn't use your baptism to make yourself comfortable with sin, but rather that you are comforted *when* you sin.

It's way too easy for us to be comfortable with sin. We are masters of excusing and *justifying* ourselves. We tell ourselves, “Just this once. It doesn't matter. I'm under grace. Don't feel too bad about it.” But being dead to sin and alive to God means that you don't do anything you merely want to do, but rather you're now alive to God and what He would have you do. But here's the thing, when you're enlivened by His grace, that causes you to actually *want* to do the things of God.

The mindset of one who is baptized looks at God's Law and says, “I want to do that, but I know that the evil within me lies close at hand, often causing me to stumble and fall. Thanks be to God that He looks not at my continued sinning, but instead on Christ who takes on my sin, and upon my Baptism that daily cleanses me of my sin. So that when I find myself doing the very thing I hate to do, I know that it is no longer I who do it, but the sin that dwells within me. Thanks be to Jesus Christ my Lord, who delivers me from this body of death, who with the Holy Spirit is my advocate to the Father, who is my mediator, my Savior, and to whom belongs all glory, so that all the comfort be mine.”

Dearly baptized, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, you are His beloved children, in whom He is well pleased. Go forth and live to God. And behold, Christ Jesus is with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.