

The Baptism of Our Lord: January 10, 2021
“Great Simplicity”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Baptism is a most beautiful gift of God. On the heels learning Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, Paul says, “*Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.*”¹

What is your calling? Paul does not speak here of God’s calling; this is your situation in the world before you are a Christian. What are you in the world? Apart from the Church, who are you? What responsibilities do you have? According to the world, there are only a few things that matter: wisdom in worldly things, power and nobility.

Many of the Christians in Rome and Corinth were not from the higher classes of society. The majority actually were slaves, or slaves that had been freed. It was not confined to the lower classes of course, but this was simply the make up of the church in those places. There was a second century philosopher named Celsus. As a critic of Christianity, he wrote many attacks against the Church. He claimed there is one true ancient religion, but Moses corrupted it; as, “the goatherds and shepherds who followed Moses as their leader were deluded by clumsy deceits into thinking that there was only one God, [and] without any rational cause ... these goatherds and shepherds abandoned the worship of many gods”.

Celsus reserved his strongest attacks against Christians who, he said, “wall themselves off and break away from the rest of mankind.” While Christians were being heavily persecuted, Celsus derided them by stressing it was more important to be a good citizen. They could retain their own belief, but were to also join in worshipping the emperors and joining their fellow citizens in defending the empire at all costs. In an appeal to civil unity and religious toleration, Celsus likened Christians to, “a swarm of bats, or ants creeping out of their nest, or frogs holding a symposium round a swamp, or worms in conventicle in a corner of the mud.”

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:26

In one of his most frontal attacks, specifically against our text for this day, he writes, “[The Christian] injunctions are like this: ‘Let no one educated, no one wise, no one sensible draw near. For these abilities are thought by us to be evils. But as for anyone ignorant, anyone stupid, anyone uneducated, anyone who is a child, let him come boldly.’ By the fact that they themselves admit that these people are worthy of their God, they show that they want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonorable and stupid, and only slaves, women, and children.”

Does any of this sound familiar? The wise and educated of our own day make the same claims about Christians. From the wise and noble of the world, we hear things like:

“Christianity: The celebration of the irony of nailing a carpenter to a piece of wood.”²

“The moment you shift the conversation to God ... you can pretend to know things you absolutely and obviously cannot know.”³

““I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”⁴

We even have anti-Jesus rhetoric coming from within those claiming to be in the Church:

“A persons character is shown through their actions in life NOT where they sit on Sunday.”⁵

“God wants us to prosper financially, to have plenty of money, to fulfill the destiny He has laid out for us.”⁶

Brothers and sisters in Christ, what do you hear in all of these quotes? You are smarter than God. Jesus, His Church, is only for the weak, the simple, the women and children who don't know any better. Once we have reached a certain level of knowledge or self-understanding, then we no longer need the crutch of a “God.”

² John Allen, United Atheists of America

³ Sam Harris

⁴ Mahatma Gandhi

⁵ Navonne Johns, Jesuit priest

⁶ Joel Osteen

What a scary and wicked place to be.

This is a very simple matter, just as is baptism. It is either the wisdom of God, or the wisdom of man. In whom do you trust? In God's wisdom, He didn't choose what was already wise in this world. He gave wisdom. He gave the ability to have faith to know that He is God and we are not. He gave Himself to all, regardless of worldly stature.

In His mercy, God chose none of us because of what we are. We are all sinners. He died for us, while we were still sinners. God did not look at our smartness and go, "Wow, I really need them here with Me." He didn't look at those born into earthly nobility and exclaim, "I need to make an alliance with them. They would really be an asset to My Kingdom." Instead God chooses people who are weak and poor and lowly. He chooses poor, miserable sinners, because they are in need of saving grace, ***"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."***⁷

Christianity is for children. Jesus is for children. We call God our Father, and hear Jesus say, ***"Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."***⁸ ***"Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."***⁹

The world says a child can choose their own schools, rules, and gender. Parents tremble in selfish fear of their vocation as parents and convince themselves that a child will bring themselves to God. Children have been placed in such high positions of authority and entertainment for us adults, that we have forgotten they are children; they have forgotten they are children. Jesus says we are not just to be like children, we are to be like infants. Infants are not wise, strong, or self-sufficient. The only thing they are good for at birth is crying, keeping me awake, and door stops.

A Christian, a child of God, is not based upon you; it is given to you as a gift. In God's infinite wisdom, He allows us to see this most clearly at the Baptismal Font. We little children are brought by God to Himself. He sees us helpless, wiggling

⁷ Mark 2:17

⁸ Mark 10:15

⁹ Matthew 18:3

infants, and He says, “That one’s mine! I’m his God; I’m her God. He is my child. She is mine.”

This is our boast. If we are to boast in anything, it is in the Lord. He did it. He has accomplished our righteousness and sanctification and redemption in Christ Jesus. We could have no righteousness of our own, no matter how glorious our good works appeared, unless Christ covered us with the cloak of His righteous deeds. We could have no holiness of our own unless Christ washed us and crowned us with His own holiness. Redemption only comes to anyone because it is poured out with Christ’s Blood on Calvary to flow to us at the Baptismal Font.

All this is the wisdom of God, His divine plan that confounds and confuses all the wisdom of men. The collective brilliance of all the geniuses on earth could not have conceived of the least detail of God’s unfolding wisdom.

Since God’s wisdom has come to you in Christ and His grace, then do not be surprised when the world despises you as nothing. They will act as if you are foolish and lowly and weak. They will try and twist your vision into something great and grand about yourself. They want you to see that beauty is from within, and that you are smarter than the average bear; in Christ you are! He gives you His wisdom and knowledge through His own Word.

When the world, or the devil, and your own sinful nature attempts to treat you like nothing; know this—God does His greatest creations out of nothing. That is the way He did it in the beginning when He made all the heavens and the earth. That is the way He does it at the Baptismal Font. That is what He does with us nothings, lost in sin, hopeless, doomed to death, and He creates sons of God. He makes you all nobles, heirs of His eternal kingdom. You are reborn as sons of the Almighty, brothers and sisters of Christ the King! We are filled with a glory that will only be revealed at the last day, the glory of Christ the Lord that is put into us by the Spirit.

God confounds the wise with His seemingly useless acts. He washes a baby, and the world says, “Lame. What a waste of time. It doesn’t really do anything at all. I can drink that same water from the faucet or even use it to wash my hands.” Nevertheless, God, right under the world’s clueless nose, makes a new creation where before there was death.

Jesus clues us in with our Gospel reading. When He stepped into the Jordan, even John the Baptist was confused, because he should be baptized by Christ. But the sinless One was baptized as a sinner. Common water, surely useless to do anything, was poured on Him. The Pharisees and the wise men all scoffed, both at Baptism and at Christ. “This is useless, and He is a nobody!”

But just then, the Triune God pulled back the curtain a little bit. “Look at this,” He said as He tore apart heaven to cry out, “You think this Man is nothing? This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!” And the Spirit came down in the form of a dove and rested upon Christ, as if to say, “You think this Baptism is nothing? See, this is the washing of the Holy Spirit!”

Jesus said nothing as He stood dripping. A wet Man who seemed like nothing at all was prepared to take all sins and all sinners on His shoulders. This same man would hang, crucified, blood dripping from the cross. This seemingly nothing of a man, is everything. He is the propitiation for your sins. He is the glory of God. He is the redemption of Israel. He is the forgiveness of your sins. He is the wisdom of God. He is the despised of God, so you may be called His own child.

This dripping redeeming blood is washed over you brothers and sisters in Christ. While the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh rage of pandemic, fear, and stupidity, fellow infants of God, your wet behind the ears faith is bold to cry,

“Death, you cannot end my gladness:

I am baptized into Christ!

When I die, I leave all sadness

To inherit paradise!

Though I lie in dust and ashes

Faith’s assurance brightly flashes:

Baptism has the strength divine

To make life immortal mine.”¹⁰ Amen.

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

¹⁰ God’s Own Child, I Gladly Say It LSB 594:4

**Prayer of the Church
The Baptism of Our Lord
10 January 2021**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. Heavenly Father, You have revealed Your Son to us in the wondrous Epiphany in the Jordan. So also You have revealed Your name and blessing to us in Holy Baptism, declaring us Your beloved heirs. Grant that we may daily die to sin and rise to newness of life, living with joy as Your baptized children. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Preserve Your Holy Church here and scattered throughout the world. Give steadfast faith to all Christians by the preaching of Your Word and through the Holy Sacraments, and send laborers into Your harvest. Enliven the love of Your saints to bear one another's burdens and to show mercy toward those outside of the Church. Quicken us in the hope of eternal life in Christ Jesus. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Preserve the family, especially all Christian homes. Turn husband and wife toward one another in love, equip fathers and mothers for their holy duty as teachers of the faith, and preserve all children in the saving faith and certain promises of their Baptism unto life everlasting. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Preserve our nation, its leaders and those who serve for the good of our people and for their protection. Grant peace in our time, O Lord, for You alone fight for us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Alka, Millie, Darlo, and Joel* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give comfort and relief to those who are sick, depressed, tired, confused, recovering, anxious, shut-in, homebound, or in any struggling in any way [*especially Carmen, Susan, Linda Freese, Katelyn Babula,, Zoey, Jen Zebuhr, Gordon Robbins, Keith Teggatz, Mary Ann Teggatz, and those we name in our hearts*]. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Be with those who are near death, that they may hear Your Son's Words of grace in their last hour and be confident in their Baptism, where You named them Your child. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

At Your invitation, O Father, we come to Your Supper for rest. Preserve us from impenitence and unbelief, cleanse us from our unrighteousness, and clothe us with the righteousness purchased with Your blood. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, You manifested Yourself, with the Holy Spirit, in the fullness of grace at the baptism of Your dear Son and, with Your voice, directed us to Him who has borne our sins, that we might receive grace and the remission of sins. Keep us, we beseech You, in the true faith. Since we have been baptized in accordance with Your command and the example of Your dear Son, we pray You to strengthen our faith by Your Holy Spirit and lead us to everlasting life and salvation; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**