

Sermon Baptism of our Lord 2019

January 13, 2019

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our Psalm we heard these words, **“The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over many waters.”** In the Gospel lesson we heard that voice. We saw our Lord Jesus come to the waters of Baptism at the hands of John the Baptist, and as we saw that, we heard there that voice that told us about this Jesus. What did we hear? **“The heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’”**

Just as the Prophet Isaiah spoke, **“Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence,”** the heavens were rent, they were opened, and the Spirit came down upon Jesus and proved Him anointed. The Father confirmed this anointing, confirmed Jesus to be the Christ, the Messiah—as that’s what both *christos* in Greek and *mashiach* in Hebrew mean: anointed. Here is the One, anointed by His Father as the very Son of God. He is spoken as that Son, declared publicly to be so—if you remember last week we talked about these things not happening in secret, in a corner, and again we see it.

Of course, in that theme that’s what this season of Epiphany is all about. That’s why we have this lesson this week. We’re looking at this Jesus as the revelation, the manifestation, the epiphany as God in the flesh. And here it is again. The child conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin. The child laid in the manger at Christmas, visited by those gentile Magi last week, here He is manifest as God in the flesh again.

But here this manifestation begins what we often call His public ministry. Here Jesus, in a sense is publicly ordained. He is given the Spirit, the Spirit He will later give. His baptism begins the fulfillment of what John said about Him, **“I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”** Of course that fulfillment is seen at Pentecost, ultimately, with the Spirit coming in the tongues of fire, but it starts here. Here is Jesus’ ordination.

And as He is ordained, what do we see? We see the authority of God in the flesh. Think about it. We see the authority of His preaching. “You have heard it said from of

old, but I say to you!” There this baptized man, will show Himself God by His preaching, by His Word. Authority begun in this manifestation from the Father, this Word spoken over the waters, **“You are my beloved Son.”** Then there is the authority of His miracles—we’ll hash those out more over the next few weeks. But the authority of this man over the created world. He is the One through whom it was created, He is the One who speaks and it obeys.

And then the authority of His death. Look at Him on the cross. Of course, that doesn’t seem authoritative. It seems weak, doesn’t it? It seems confusing. This man, who is God in the flesh, abused by sinful men. Beaten by them. Scourged. Nailed to a tree to bleed and suffocate to death. But look at how the Father shows the authority of this man when He dies. Look at what happens. The sky is darkened. The confession of a gentile. Then the more remarkable events: the curtain tearing in the temple; the statement by the Father that God is not in the temple anymore but in this man. The earthquake in Jerusalem with that. Then Matthew speaks of tombs opening, the raising of the bodies of saints. There is the statement of God’s authority with this Man. Then there’s the resurrection. There’s the ultimate statement. As Paul says in the opening to His letter to the Romans that Jesus was **“descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.”** All of this then we see in conjunction with that voice over the waters.

But as we think of this, there’s a bit of a “what does this mean?” here, isn’t there? You know this is all great, Jesus is God in the flesh, the Father speaks that word revealing Jesus to be God in the flesh as the voice is spoken over those waters, but so what?

Well, to start look at what Jesus is doing in John’s baptism. Or perhaps start with the question, what was John’s baptism? He called it a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, right? This is why we see John balk at baptizing Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel. John understands. Why would he baptize Jesus? Jesus doesn’t need forgiveness. Jesus isn’t the one who needs to repent. John should repent, not Jesus. John needs forgiveness, not Jesus. And yet Jesus is baptized. And as He is baptized, He’s aligning Himself with those sinners. He’s being named a sinner just like you and me. In other words, He’s proving that which He said about not coming for the healthy, but the sick, not for the righteous, but the unrighteous.

This isn't to say Jesus is serving sin. It's not to say that Jesus is actually sinning. No. But it's to say just what Paul says, God **"made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."** In these waters, Jesus aligned with sinners. He accepted that there is a judgment for sin, the judgment John talked about; the separating of the wheat from the chaff. There's a judgment and in aligning Himself with sinners, Jesus was saying He'd put Himself under that wrath for sinners. The perfectly righteous One, taking on the wrath of your unrighteousness. That's what this Word spoken over the waters is revealing.

But as we think about a word over the water, we can go further. We can go beyond what's sort of abstract or strictly historical and connect to you. To do that, think of the first time you hear words over the water in Scripture. Can you recall that? Start at the very beginning. **"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."** Now you might be thinking, "OK, there's the voice, the Word, over the waters there, but what's that have to do with this?"

Well, what happened when that word was spoken over those waters? When God said, "Let there be light," what happened? "There was light," right? God spoke, and it effected what it said. The Word did it. So what am I saying? Am I saying that when God spoke this word to Jesus that's what actually made Him the Son of the Father? No. In fact absolutely not. That would be a heresy that we call adoptionism. That is to say, if we think that then we're saying that the Father adopted Jesus as His own son. That is not what happened. The Father begets Jesus as His Son eternally. The Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, is the Son by nature, by this begetting. And this Son entered into the flesh of a man at conception. It's not as though the man Jesus just had God come possess him, like a spirit. No, the Son was incarnate in this human flesh. So the Word over that water didn't effect the adoption of Jesus. No. But it did effect an adoption as the son of God. And you might be thinking, "I thought Jesus was the only Son of God." And you're right. Jesus is the only Son of God by nature. But did you know He does have many sons by adoption? You see that Word effected your adoption as a son of God. As the Father looked upon that Son Jesus and spoke that Word He spoke it to Jesus. But you are in Jesus, and as you are in Jesus that Word spoken to Him affects you. It effects your state as a child of God.

So then, you have to ask another question. How are you in Jesus? Where were you joined to Jesus such that this Word spoken to Him would be spoken to you as well?

Do you know? Think about another instance of the voice over the waters. Think about that voice, that Word of Jesus to you. Which one is that? “I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

You see this Word spoken, did what it said, and you were baptized. And as you were baptized the promise of God in baptism was yours, **“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”** Do you hear it? What happened in baptism? You were buried with Him. You were united to Jesus. You were joined to His death on the cross, so that you were crucified there. Your sin was dealt with there. When Jesus said “It is finished, it is done,” He said that about your sin. Your sin went into His tomb when He was buried and left there. It’s done. And as you were joined to Him, then when God spoke of His pleasure with Jesus, that pleasure of the Father is yours. You are His beloved Son and with you He is well pleased. Have you deserved that? No. Does that mean you should keep sinning? No. Look at what Paul says, **“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”** No, don’t keep sinning that’s not who you are. You are a son of God in Christ, a son raised in Jesus’s resurrection forgiveness.

Now as I say this, you might have noticed that I keep saying you are a son of God, and wondering about that. No I’m not trying to be disrespectful, or gender neutral, or anything like that. No, I’ve mentioned this before, but it’s worth repeating. I’m speaking the way Scripture speaks. Scripture calls you a son of God because that is where the inheritance is. It is in being a son. Sons are the heirs, and you want to be a son to be the heir, to be one of those included in the eternal inheritance of life and joy. You want the voice of the Heavenly Father to speak over those waters to you, and to say to you, **“You are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased.”** And in Christ He does. Those words over the waters are spoken to you. You can hear them, cling to them in the faith of knowing that the God who speaks them loves you, a sinner, aligns Himself with you in the midst of your sin, and promises you then that promise in Isaiah, **“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”** Amen.