



## Pastor Gwen's Sermon Baptism of Our Lord "Baptism of Our Lord" Sunday, January 12, 2025

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock, and my redeemer. AMEN

I AM BAPTIZED! Martin Luther used to take great comfort from these words. When it seemed to him that the whole Church had left the teachings of the Gospel and when he was under scrutiny from church officials as to the truth of his beliefs, as well as when his life was being threatened and when he suffered self-doubt, he would boldly proclaim, "I AM BAPTIZED".

Those words do not belong to only Luther. They belong to each and every baptized person. To each of us who have had water poured over us in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Baptism is important and the common link between us.

In our Lutheran tradition the first Sunday after Epiphany is the Baptism of Our Lord Sunday. It is a time when we clearly hear the word of God that "Jesus is my Son." Last week we heard of the three wise men following the star, bowing before the king of kings and presenting Jesus with gifts. That was their epiphany. Today, we continue to have the revelation of Jesus as God's only son at His baptism where we hear God himself speak and claim that Jesus is His Son, a Son that He is well pleased with.

Jesus is baptized. We are not told where, by Luke. We are not told who baptizes him. The understanding that John baptized Jesus in the River Jordan comes from the other Gospel writers, Matthew, and Mark, but not Luke. The baptism itself was not Luke's main focus, but rather he places the importance on what happened after the baptism.

After Jesus was baptized, he prays. Luke finds it important to recount when Jesus prayed. The times when He prays are emphasized in his Gospel many times over. It is the praying of Jesus that motivated the disciples to ask Jesus to teach them to pray. Luke wants to show us the power and importance of prayer.

And then something exciting happens in our reading. “The heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove.” Luke here provides a means for the “coming down of the spirit”. And again, Luke is the only Gospel writer that makes the point of saying that the dove was in “bodily form”. Maybe this is to signify that the Holy Spirit is so tangible that it will stay, remaining with Jesus and all the baptized forever.

Then we hear the voice from heaven, “This is my son, the beloved with whom I am well pleased.” God has affirmed the special relationship with Jesus and uses words that express the closest kind of familial and emotional bond. Jesus is “my Son”. He is “beloved”, and he is one with whom I am well “pleased”. From this we can gather that God has a special confidence in Jesus. Through prayer, Jesus has remained in a relationship with His Father in Heaven. And with that relationship there goes some responsibility. The Spirit coming to Jesus implies a mission. That special anointing, the baptism of Jesus is to empower him for ministry on earth. God’s confidence in Jesus binds them together with the Holy Spirit to live out God’s will in the world. And this I think is the significance that Luke is telling us about in this baptism story. The message here is about our own baptism too, our need to pray and remember our anointing with the Holy Spirit. We too are commissioned for ministry on earth.

Just as Jesus is commissioned for ministry, so too he commissioned his disciples for ministry before he was put to death. Matthew 28:18, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. And as the disciples had their marching orders so do we. In our own baptism we were marked with the cross of Christ forever, as our baptismal rite says, we are re-born into a Christ like life each and every day. We are to be Christ in the world. It is our mission to reach out to a broken world. We are to be the hands of Christ in the world. Hands that bring God’s love to all people.

Every day when we wake, we should be reminded of our baptism and awaken to a new life in Jesus Christ. Yes, we may fall short, but we can be renewed again and again, re-created over and over again with the remembrance of our baptismal promise.

We remember Lutheran Theology 101 where we learned that we celebrate only two sacraments and because for Luther, they must contain three things. First, there must be an earthly element, for baptism it is water. Secondly, there is the command that we heard before usually called the Great Commission, to go out and baptize others in the name of the triune God. Lastly, a promise. What do you suppose that promise is? It is for the baptized to have forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. Mark 16:16 says it simply, “The one who believes and is baptized will be saved.” That sacred and Holy act of water and the Word of God coming together with God’s commandment is amazing. When that Holy Spirit enters our hearts, we are set on a course of great things, all the things that God has created us to be.

Baptism according to Luther is a “most precious thing”. And we must remember that, although it is performed by humans, it is an act of God. A true gift from God. For if we believe and are baptized, we will be saved. I am often times asked why we do not baptize a second time. For instance, if someone has had a faith struggle and becomes a non-believer, and then later in life returns to the faith and wants to recommit himself to the Lord. Why

don't we baptize again? Well, to me, the answer is quite simple. Baptism is an act of God, and he gets it right the first time. There is no need to redo what God has already done. Salvation comes to us in those waters of baptism. The Holy Spirit works in our hearts and leads the way for faith to grow in us so we too can have a beloved and well pleasing relationship with God.

Sometimes in Confirmation class a student will ask me, "Then why do I have to come to confirmation to learn all this stuff if God has already done it for me?" My response is that what they are learning will give them the opportunity to speak on their own behalf and not just have their parents do it for them. Confirmation class should really be called Affirmation of Baptism. Students learn why they believe what they believe and can say whether or not they believe in the baptismal promise. And what a wonderful thing then can do so on their own. Even more new doors are opened to them when they have a relationship with Jesus as we all do.

Luther said, "The Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after." Every day when we awake our baptismal promise is refreshed. Remembering our baptism gives us the defense against the evils of life. Without those refreshing waters of baptism, we are defenseless against the works of the devil. That is some powerful water!

Water is an interesting element; water is featured often in scripture. From Genesis where God separated the land and the waters, to Noah who built his ark because God told him rain was coming, to Moses parting the Red Sea, to our Gospel story today where Jesus is anointed with water, thus beginning his ministry. Water is important in the Bible. And it is important to us.

The visual of a baptismal font in our sanctuary is probably the best reminder of our own baptism. I remember that we had discussion after discussion when we did the addition to my former congregation St Olaf, as to where we would put the baptismal font. It was a rather ugly brown cabinet that we hauled out of the back room when there was a baptism. When the sanctuary was remodeled, our Pastor Larry, who some of you met when he was here representing the ELCA Foundation, or at my ordination, was a wonderful carpenter. He made us a new baptismal font. It had the same characteristics as our lectern, pulpit, and back wall altar. It was just beautiful, with intricate scroll work and yet some did not want it in the sanctuary. So, it got moved to the back room. I was quite distressed. Since I am a very visual person, I wanted that font in the sanctuary, up front. And since we entered the sanctuary from the front side, everyone would have to walk by it each Sunday. With much discussion, it finally found a permanent home right there. You know how churches work. You cannot please everyone all the time. Well, I was pleased it finally found a home in the entryway, with the clean and dry sterling silver bowl inset in the top. Can you imagine that, a dry font? What does that tell you?

Some of you might have heard this story before. While I was congregational president, the altar guild and I played a little game. For several months, very time I walked by the font and saw no water in it, I filled it up. Over and over again I would find it empty. And over and over again I would fill it with water. Finally, the head of the altar guild asked me if I knew who was putting the water in the font and making stains in the beautiful shiny silver

bowl. I simply said, "Yes, I know who it is". She then complained of the hard water stains on the bowl and how difficult it was to keep it shiny. I mentioned that she might get some soft or distilled water and then it might not happen. She was so glad I thought of that and soon she had a gallon or two on hand so she could keep the font filled! Thanks Cindy!

Baptism is not an insurance policy to heaven, but it is our boarding pass to a lifetime with Jesus. In our baptism we begin a relationship with Jesus which is nourished, feed, strengthened, enriched, and kept alive by faithfully availing oneself to God's means of grace. We need to continue to read God's word, pray, and eat at his table. Our journey through life with Jesus needs the encouragement, the strength, the lasting power of a faithful presence in and with a community of believers.

After all, the body of Christ, the church, the community of faith is another part of God's gift to us through Baptism. We grow in community to see our faith and trust in God's grace mature. We are all brothers and sisters equally in Christ. And as the faithful community of Christ we care, help, pray for, support those in the community as if they are indeed relatives. We are all children of the same heavenly father.

Baptism is a unique event in our lives. It is an event that includes everyone. It is applied to each one equally and it leads us to be responsible for each other in the community. Baptism is to be a light of hope and strength for those in Christ and those who are still searching.

We respond to our baptisms, allowing the Holy Spirit to stir in us faith. A faith that is secure in the knowledge of God's love for us. It is a faith that we need to share with others the good news of the Gospel. Our example of how to do this is Jesus Christ himself. We begin our life with Him in the waters of baptism. Each day we are made new again by His promise of eternal life. This free gift renews us daily.

So, I urge you to remember your own baptism. Dip your finger in the font as you pass by on your way to communion. Remember the promises of everlasting life and forgiveness. If you need to say it out loud like Luther, I AM BAPTIZED that is fine. Or if you need to have the visual of water in the font like I do, that is OK too. However, you do it, just remember that we all like Jesus, called by name to the baptismal font. It is with glad hearts that we hear God calling us, his children. We are all sons and daughters of God, with whom He is well pleased. AMEN