

First Sunday after Epiphany – January 11, 2015
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

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Mark 1:4-11 (NIV)

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5) The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 6) John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7) And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8) I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." 9) **At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.** 10) **Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.** 11) **And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."**

Dear Christian Friends:

I'm sure that almost all of you have had the opportunity to observe a baptism. And so you would be able to make some comparisons between the baptism of Jesus and the typical baptisms that we are used to seeing today. I think you'd agree that there are some striking differences – it's always a happy occasion when we have the privilege of baptizing adults and older children but the majority of the baptisms in our congregation involve infants less than 30 days old – Jesus was about 30 years old. It's nice and warm inside where we perform our baptisms with a basin to hold the water. Jesus was baptized outdoors in a remote area near the Jordan River. John – the one who baptized Jesus dressed in a rather unusual manner – with his clothing made of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist. My dress is rather common especially for a pastor conducting a worship service.

Water was used both in Jesus' baptism as well as in the baptisms which are performed in our congregation. Some wonderful, but invisible things, take place when a person is baptized in our congregation. At Jesus' baptism, some wonderful things which were **visible** to all took place. The heavens were opened and the Spirit of God appeared in the form of a dove and descended upon Jesus. I once did a private baptism in the summer time and we had the doors open because it was hot and a barn swallow flew into the church – but it didn't want to have anything to do with us. But that's another story. After Jesus was baptized the voice of God the Father proclaimed his pleasure with Jesus. Through his Word God has also expressed his pleasure with the individuals who are baptized in our congregation – making them his children through the washing of water with the word.

Our text for today which speaks of Jesus baptism gives us an opportunity to think about our own baptisms. For some of us those baptisms took place a long time ago ... for others the day of their baptism is much more recent. But ultimately it is Jesus' baptism that gives meaning to our baptisms.

Theme: Jesus' Baptism Gives Meaning to our Baptisms

1. He was baptized to provide the righteousness we lack because of our sins
2. His baptism proves he is the Savior of all so we can confess our faith in him.
3. His baptism reveals him as the Son of God; ours makes us Sons of God.

Our text tells us that **John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** The apostle Paul describes **our baptism as a washing with water through the word which cleanses us and makes us holy.** (Eph. 5:26) The word the Bible uses when it speaks of baptism was a common word used to describe using water to wash something. When we realize that, we won't make the mistake that some have made of insisting that immersion is the only proper form for baptism. Baptism is the application of water in any manner. But as the apostle Paul has indicated for us it's not just simple water. It's water connected with God's word.

Baptism is also something which has been commanded by God. These two facts help us to understand why we teach that baptism provides us with the forgiveness of our sins.

The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. Another way of expressing this thought is to say that the crowds of people were baptized at the Jordan River. The Jordan River was the location where the baptisms took place. But more importantly we want to note that the people who were baptized came confessing their sins.

That still happens today. Older individuals confess their sins prior to being baptized. When parents bring their children to be baptized they are confessing that these children are sinful. And that's exactly what the Bible teaches. After Adam fell into sin – the Bible teaches us that his children were born in his likeness, in his own image – not in the image of God. (Genesis 5:3) Together with the Psalmist we are compelled to confess: (Psalm 51:5) **Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.**

Since children are born sinful they need to be born again of water and the Spirit through baptism. John was preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Repentance includes sorrow over sin together with a turning away from sin. Our baptism is an acknowledgment of our sins and our sinfulness. Through Baptism the Holy Spirit gives us new life and renews us so that we strive with the Lord's help to set aside our sin.

So why did Jesus come to be baptized? After all he had no sin. He was born as the sinless Son of God because he was conceived in a miraculous fashion by the Holy Spirit. John's preaching about Jesus made this clear – in our text John spoke of Jesus as one **more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8) I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.**

In the Gospel of Matthew we hear that John was reluctant to baptize Jesus. He realized that Jesus was the holy one and that he was a sinner. He felt that it would have been improper for him to baptize Jesus – since he was the one who needed the forgiveness which Jesus had come to provide. We read in (Matthew 3:13-15) **Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14) But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15) Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.**

Jesus came to be baptized because this was in keeping with his Father's will. It was the proper thing to do at this time. By requesting to be baptized Jesus is becoming sin for us – he's allowing himself to be treated as a sinner. At his baptism Jesus was treated as a sinner – when he died on the cross he was also being treated as a sinner. There he suffered God's eternal wrath and punishment for our sins. The Apostle Paul says: (2 Corinthians 5:21) **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** Isaiah foretold it this way: (Isaiah 53:5-6) **He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6) ... the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.** Perhaps John the Baptist said it in the simplest way of all when he proclaimed: **Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**

Jesus was baptized to provide the righteousness we lack because of our sins. There's a big difference between our baptism and Jesus' baptism. Jesus' baptism was done so that he could provide forgiveness of sins to us. We're baptized because we need that forgiveness.

Jesus' baptism proves he is the Savior of all so we can confess our faith in him.

When parents bring their little children to be baptized or when a teenager or an adult requests baptism for themselves this is more than an act of obedience on their part. Baptism is not something we do for God. God is the one who promises to pour out his blessings on us through baptism. And so when we make use of baptism we are confessing our faith in Christ and our acceptance of his teachings. Since the Lord commanded that all nations be

baptized we gladly bring our children to him with the confidence that he intends to bless them through baptism. On Pentecost Sunday when Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on his disciples in miraculous fashion Peter proclaimed that promise of Baptism was for parents as well as children. (Acts 2:38-39) **Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39) The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call."**

Jesus' baptism offers proof that he is our Savior. **Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.**

Once again it is briefly worth noting that these words simply are telling us that Jesus stepped back onto the river bank following his baptism. It doesn't make any difference if Jesus was over his head in the river or simply standing in ankle deep water – the only way he would be able to get back on dry land was by coming up out of the water. It was at that point that something truly incredible happened – the heavens were opened for him as a demonstration that God himself was present at this significant event. He was in control of the situation ruling with his grace and power.

Furthermore our text tells us that Spirit of God descended on him like a dove. The OT Scriptures had described the Savior as one who would be anointed with the Holy Spirit. The people spoke of the Messiah or the Christ – they were looking for the anointed one. The Psalmist wrote about the Christ (Psalm 45:7) **God has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.** Jesus' companions were the prophets of old – they too were blessed by the Holy Spirit but Jesus was set above them – he enjoyed the full measure of the Spirit's power. In the home of Cornelius – Peter proclaims that this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus. (Acts 10:38, 43) **God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. ... (43) All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."**

The Scriptures speak of the one who will save us from our sins as being Immanuel – God with us – true God and true man. This text also has evidence of the fact that Jesus is both true God and true man. Since Jesus as the Son of God is equal in power and majesty with the Father and the Spirit we must conclude that it was according to his human nature that the Spirit was poured out upon him. As a man he was equipped by the Spirit for the awesome task of saving sinners from their sins. Jesus began this work publicly at his baptism. And so we conclude **that while our baptism is a confession of faith – Jesus' baptism proves he is the Savior.**

After Jesus was baptized, John the Baptist began to point to him as the promised Savior. We read in the Gospel of John: (John 1:32-34) **Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. (33) And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' (34) I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One (the Son of God)."**

Jesus' baptism reveals him as the Son of God; ours makes us Sons of God.

The fact that Jesus is God's Son is clearly revealed to us at Jesus' baptism. Not only were the heavens opened and not only did the Spirit of God descend and remain on Jesus but the Father proclaimed in a **voice [that] came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."**

These words confirm for us once again the fact that Jesus is true God from all eternity but they are recorded here to assure us of the Father's approval on his Son's work as our Savior. Here the Father announces that he is pleased with what Jesus – the God-man has done and will do. By volunteering for baptism, an act which is for sinners, Jesus had taken upon himself the sins of the world. This is good and pleases God who wants all men to come to the knowledge of the truth and to be saved.

The Father's stamp of approval on his Son's work to save us from our sins provides us with assurance that our baptism brings us into God's family. Titus speaks of those who have been baptized as **heirs having the hope of**

eternal life. Galatians 3:26-27 reminds us: You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27) for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

As members of God's family through faith in Christ Jesus our baptisms offer us the daily assurance that we are God's children. Through baptism the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ and works in us the desire to live a new life. We are no longer slaves to sin. (Rom 6:4-6) Therefore our baptism reminds us to put off sin each day and to live before God in true righteousness and holiness because of Christ's blessings of forgiveness, new life and salvation which are given to us in baptism. As baptized children of God may it be our daily desire to live lives which thank Jesus for his wonderful gives and which glorify the God of our Salvation.

We've had a wonderful privilege today to be reminded of the blessings of baptism. We've been reminded that Jesus' baptism made our baptisms a blessing to us. I pray that you will recall your baptisms often as you daily remind yourselves that through baptism God has brought you into his family. Amen.