

The Baptism of Our Lord
Sunday, January 14, 2024

QUESNEL

“The Baptism with Our Lord” (Mark 1:4-11; Romans 6:1-11)

Today we celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord.

- Last Sunday we celebrated the Epiphany of Our Lord.
 - Because I chose to commemorate Epiphany last Sunday
 - I took the spot that is normally reserved
 - for the Baptism of our Lord,
 - the First Sunday after the Epiphany.
- And by popular acclamation last Sunday,
 - we hear an account of Jesus being baptized.
 - This year it is the account in the Gospel of Mark.

And St. Mark says,

- *“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.”*
 - and you say,
 - And you say,
 - “OK, so Jesus got baptized.
 - Why is that important?
 - What does this have to do with me?”
- And I say,
 - “A whole lot.
 - As we will now see.”
- The Gospel reading from Mark
 - and the Epistle reading from Romans
 - will make the connection for us,
 - the connection between the Baptism of Our Lord
 - and our own baptism.

But first, the Baptism of Our Lord.

- Christ’s baptism.
 - And we ask:
 - What is so special about Jesus being baptized?
 - Well, the most obvious thing is,

- He did not need to be.
- Jesus did not need to be baptized.
 - John was preaching a baptism of repentance
 - for the forgiveness of sins,
 - and what did Jesus need that for?
 - Of what did He need to repent?
- Nothing.
 - What sins did He need forgiveness for?
 - None.
 - The people being baptized
 - were confessing their own sins.
- What sins did Jesus have to confess?
 - None.
 - That is what seems strange
 - about Jesus coming to be baptized.
 - He was not a sinner.

But how about you?

- Are you a sinner?
 - Do you have sins to confess?
 - Do you have sins to repent of?
 - Yes, of course you do, and so do I.
- You and I need to make a trip to the wilderness,
 - to hear John preaching repentance.
 - For you and I daily sin much,
 - in thought, word, and deed,
 - in what we do wrong
 - and in what we fail to do right.
- Read the Ten Commandments,
 - and you will see how those commandments
 - pierce through our self-defense rationalizations.
- We must realize how seriously God takes the breaking
 - of His commandments
 - and how penetrating His eye is.
 - You will soon discover
 - that you have plenty of sins to confess.
 - You will begin to see
 - how deeply rooted sin is in you.

But with Jesus, this was not the case.

- He is the sole exception
 - in the whole history of humanity.
 - He is the only one without sin.
 - Jesus is pure and holy
 - as He is walking to the Jordan
 - to be baptized.
- This singular point is important for us
 - for it ties us to our salvation.
- Christ is, in fact,
 - the sinless Son of God,
 - who kept God's law as it was meant to be kept.
 - Jesus is the only one who can say that.

So then, why is He getting baptized?

- On the surface, it doesn't make sense.
 - But upon closer inspection it really does,
 - especially when you understand
 - why the Son of God
 - came in the flesh
 - in the first place.
- He came to rescue sinners.
 - And to do that,
 - He needed to physically tie Himself with us.
 - But more importantly us to physically tie
 - Ourselves to Him.
- My father was not a great fan of the way he was raised.
 - His father sent boys out to do men's work
 - without ever joining them
 - to teach them how to do the work.
- A lot of farm equipment was damaged and broken as a result.
 - My grandfather would sit in the house
 - and direct his 11 boys
 - to go and do the work.
 - Not only did it breed resentment,
 - for the most part is taught all of them to respect their father
 - but I cannot say that I would describe their relationship to him
 - as love.
 - The one daughter, Aunt Emma,
 - loved him
 - but she understood why.

- He did not feel as if he had the authority to “teach” her,
 - that after all was his wife’s responsibility
 - and I must say that Grandma did a better job.
- Likewise, having a God that is unwilling
 - or unable to immerse Himself
 - into our lives and our problems
 - is rather a useless God.
- Other religions of the world teach that,
 - Religions like Muslims,
 - but not Christians.
- Jesus gets in the water with us,
 - going to that place
 - where only sinners belong.
- The ministry that He is about to begin
 - will take Him to where sinners deserve to go:
 - to death,
 - death under God’s judgment.
- The sinless Jesus is here identifying with us sinners -----
 - This is the first thing we can say
 - about His baptism.
 - Notice the reverse way of saying this truth -----
 - Baptism is first of all
 - Jesus’ way of identifying with us.
- Secondly
 - it is the way
 - we are identified with Him.

The Holy Scriptures continue,

- *“And when He came up out of the water,*
 - *immediately He saw the heavens opening.”*
 - The heavens were opened.
 - And really,
 - It is a little stronger than that.
- The text actually says,
 - *“He saw the heavens being torn open.”*
 - The Greek verb means “to split apart.”
- When Jesus was baptized,
 - He saw the heavens “being split apart,”
 - “being torn open.”
 - There is almost a violent feel to it.

- This is right away, immediately, at the start of Mark’s gospel.
 - At the end of this gospel,
 - you will find this same “split apart” verb used again,
 - where at Jesus’ death
 - the curtain of the temple is “torn in two.”
- The Revelation of St. John,
 - chapter 6,
 - also uses similar imagery
 - to indicate a special revealing
 - by God
 - to His creation.
- Already here at the start of Jesus’ ministry,
 - at His baptism,
 - we are given a hint of what is to come.
 - We are being told,
 - “Pay Attention,” This is important!

The heavens are being torn open.

- It is like there was an earthquake in the sky.
 - ?What is going on here?
 - When God’s Son undertook His saving mission
 - of identifying with sinners
 - and going to the cross for them,
 - there is a deeply physical
 - and cosmic shift going on.
- At Christ’s baptism,
 - there is a passing of blessing
 - between heaven and earth.
 - Heaven is opening up,
 - and the Father and the Spirit
 - add Their blessing
 - to what the Son is doing.

This is what they do.

- First, the Holy Spirit descends
 - in the form of a dove
 - and comes to Jesus.
 - This is God’s blessing,
 - favour,

- and choice
 - empowering this man,
 - the Christ,
 - as the anointed one.
- Jesus is being anointed with power
 - to do the work of His public ministry,
 - as the Messiah
 - which He is about to begin.
- These gifts of the Spirit,
 - Listed in 1 Corinthians 12
 - These include wisdom,
 - understanding,
 - counsel,
 - fortitude or strength,
 - knowledge,
 - piety,
 - and fear of the Lord.
-
- In short,
 - everything you also received at your Baptism
 - these will mark all of Jesus' ministry,
 - as He inaugurates the kingdom of heaven
 - here on earth.

The Spirit descends,

- and a voice comes from heaven.
 - This time it is the voice of the Father,
 - giving divine approval,
 - assurance,
 - and encouragement to His Son
 - as He undertakes His mission.
- *“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”*
 - We do not need to guess at this,
 - the Father was well pleased with the Son
 - from before the foundation of the world,
 - knowing that His Son
 - would willingly take on this mission
 - to redeem the world.
- Now, this Son,
 - in our bodily form,

- incarnate,
 - Jesus Christ,
 - begins that journey of labour
 - to the cross,
 - and at this time the Father speaks His approval
 - and His love.

So, what does all of this have to do with you?

- Everything!
 - The triune God,
 - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
 - are united on this great plan
 - to redeem sinful humanity
 - yes, to save even you.
- That will only happen
 - through Jesus connecting personally
 - and physically
 - with us sinners
 - and taking our place
 - and bearing our sins into death.

At His baptism,

- Jesus sets out on this course
 - that will take Him to the cross.
- There were signs that this would happen already in Jesus' life.
 - The Angels and Shepherds at His birth
 - The acclamation of Simeon and Anna at His Circumcision
 - The amazement at His wisdom at the Temple.
- Now in hindsight
 - we can see that He has completed that journey
 - and defeated sin and death,
 - the result is complete forgiveness for you
 - and your and my final victory over death.
- This is what Jesus won for you
 - by making that journey
 - from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

And now Jesus shares His victory with you

- when you are joined to Him

- in your baptism.
- In Holy Baptism,
 - you are connected to Christ,
 - united to him
 - just as He was connected to you
 - in His baptism.
- You have been joined to Jesus.
 - He shares with you
 - all the blessings
 - he won for you
 - by His cross and resurrection.
- the baptism of our Lord
 - leads to a baptism
 - with our Lord
 - for we are baptized with Christ.

That is what St. Paul is teaching in the discourse on baptism in Romans 6.

- St. Paul says that in our baptism
 - we have been united with Christ
 - in His death and resurrection.
 - This has profound implications
 - for both our daily life and
 - our eternal life.

For our daily life,

- it means a daily dying and rising with Christ.
 - Dying to sin,
 - and rising to newness of life.
 - The forgiveness of sins
 - is not meant to be used
 - as a license to sin.
- That is a distortion of God's grace,
 - and St. Paul is arguing against that here.
 - Just because God is gracious
 - and He forgives sins -----
 - that should not be taken as an excuse
 - to go on sinning.
- No, Christ died for those sins,
 - ?so how can we go on living in them?

- We have been joined to Jesus,
 - buried with Him in baptism,
 - and our old sinful self
 - needs to be put under the water
 - and drowned every single day.
- We come up out of that baptismal water
 - each new day
 - to live as the new people
 - we are in Christ.
- We have been joined to Jesus,
 - connected to Christ,
 - and that will show up
 - in the way we live.
 - That is what baptismal living
 - is all about.

Connected to Christ in baptism,

- means everything to us
 - for eternal life also.
 - Our sinful self
 - has been put under the water with Jesus
 - and drowned.
 - Our sins have been washed away.
 - We are forgiven.
- Peace with God once more is made.
 - No obstacle,
 - no barrier,
 - exists between us and God.
- The heavens have been torn open,
 - and the way is clear.
 - The tearing of the curtain
 - in the temple
 - at the death of Jesus on the cross
 - confirms this truth of our baptism.
- Christ has opened the kingdom of heaven
 - to all believers.
 - You, a baptized believer in Christ,
 - you have eternal life.
 - You have eternal life already now,
 - and that means death →

- will not have the last word.
- You have been joined to Jesus in baptism,
 - and therefore you share in His resurrection
 - from the dead.

The baptism **of** our Lord

- leads to the baptism **with** our Lord.
 - Christ puts all the benefits of His baptism
 - into ours.
- He takes all our sins upon Himself
 - and gives us all His righteousness
 - in their place.
- Christ,
 - who was anointed with the Spirit,
 - baptizes us with the Holy Spirit,
 - to give us newness of life
 - both for now
 - and eternal life forever.
- The heavenly Father,
 - who called Jesus His beloved Son,
 - takes us
 - as His own beloved sons and daughters.

The great church father St. Ambrose wrote:

- “Our Lord was baptized,
 - not to be cleansed Himself,
 - but to cleanse the waters,
 - so that those waters,
 - cleansed by the flesh of Christ
 - which knew no sin,
 - might have the power of baptism.”
- Brothers and sisters in Christ,
 - this is the power of baptism:
 - that our Lord got into the water with us sinners,
 - washing away our sins
 - and putting His righteousness
 - and His life into our baptism.
- This is not some symbolic sort of thing
 - But is the real life of Christ

- in our real baptism,
 - just like He put His real Body and Blood
 - into the bread and wine
 - of Holy Communion
- The Baptism **of** Our Lord
 - leads to our baptism **with** our Lord,
 - and that means life for you and me.
- We may not totally understand
 - the details of how God loves us in Baptism,
 - but we understand its reality.
 - We understand the love of God
 - that is present
 - and we join ourselves to Him
 - in thanksgiving.

AMEN

This sermon was prepared for the Divine Service at Trinity Lutheran Church, Quesnel, BC and was presented on January 14, 2024, the day we celebrated the Baptism of our Lord Sunday. If you have questions or comments please feel free to call or text Pastor Alan Visser at (250) 552-4685.