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Baptism of Our Lord (Series C)

January 10, 2016

Text: Isaiah 43:1–7; Luke 3:15–22

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Some 700 years before the birth of the Lord Jesus, the prophet Isaiah wrote a somewhat enigmatic promise/prophecy. Isaiah 43:2, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” The promise given to God’s people is that nothing in heaven or earth will be able to harm or destroy God’s people. Our eternal victory is secure.

The Lord Himself stands behind this promise. Vs. 3, “For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.” Our God is not just god, in the sense of an all-powerful being. He is certainly that. But He is also our Savior, the One who saves, redeems, and rescues. Such a promise of ultimate invincibility given by a Savior God resonates beautifully with Romans 8:38–39, “<sup>38</sup>For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God’s love for His people so completely covers them that nothing in all creation can separate us from the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Such is the promise given to us as God’s redeemed people. On this side of eternity, we live in this promise by faith. In the resurrection on the Last Day, we will experience it in its fullness for all eternity. These are the days of faith, a God-given faith which overcomes the world, the devil, death, and all evil.

Now the prophecy. This is where it really gets interesting. For today we commemorate and celebrate our Lord’s baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. Listen to Isaiah’s prophecy in light of Christ. Let me read again, “When you (Jesus) pass through the waters (of the Jordan River), I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire (of your bloody crucifixion on Good Friday) you shall not be burned, and the flame (of God’s hot anger against sin and evil) shall not consume you.” In other words, the prophecy is about Jesus’ baptism and Jesus’ crucifixion. That’s quite a claim I’m making. But the

Lord Himself stands behind the prophecy. So let's consider this prophecy about Jesus' baptism and crucifixion.

Our Lord's baptism in River Jordan is rightly considered to be programmatic. It sets the boundaries and the goal of everything the Lord Jesus is attempting to accomplish. Consider this...over these past couple of weeks we've heard time and time again the angels declare that Jesus, the One born in Bethlehem of Mary's virgin womb, that Jesus, the One worshipped by Wise Men from the East, is none other than the Son of God the Father Almighty. Jesus is God's holy one.

Why on heaven and earth must He enter into the waters of the Jordan River in the first place? We know that He is baptized by John the Baptist but why should the Holy One of God submit to such a ritual? John's baptism was a sinner's baptism. Only those with sin need to come to John. Only those who need repentance need place their foot into Jordanian waters. The gospels tell us the kind of people who came out to John to be baptized: tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners of every sort. When the righteous ones – the Pharisees and Scribes – came to John, he chastised them as being vipers of the worst sort subject to God's end-times wrath unless they repent and be baptized.

That Jesus enters into the River Jordan in the first place should cause us to pause. He alone of all humanity, could have rightly said, "That baptism is not for me. I have no sin from which to repent. Carry on, cousin John. I'll sit back and watch." But thanks be to God. Our Lord passed through the waters of the Jordan River. And by so doing, the Holy Son of God, indentified Himself with us sinful human beings. He received a sinner's baptism so that He might save sinners.

We have a messy Messiah. In the Jordan River, Jesus takes upon Himself our sin, our infirmities, our shame. The Lord Jesus is not ashamed or embarrassed to be identified with us sinners. During Christmas, we celebrated that Jesus took upon Himself our human nature. The angels sang, shepherds worshipped, Wise Men traveled and adored that Savior who became a flesh and blood human being. Today, we celebrate that Jesus not only took upon Himself our human nature, but He takes our sinfulness and sorrows into Himself. Remember, baptism sets the boundary and the goal of our Lord's ministry.

Immediately after Jesus was baptized, the Lord prayed (vs. 21). Luke then describes what happens: the heavens were opened, the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove, and the Father declares of Jesus, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well

pleased” (vs. 22). Talk about a glorious program of salvation: prayerful reception of holy baptism gives the Holy Spirit and the Father’s declaration that you are His beloved, well-pleasing child. Nothing changed when you were baptized into Christ Jesus through God’s Trinitarian name. Through the promise of God’s baptismal word, you are filled with the Holy Spirit and declared to be well-pleasing, beloved children of God.

Isaiah had prophesied that “when you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers; they shall not overwhelm you.” Jesus received a sinner’s baptism. And by so doing, He was anointed by the Holy Spirit and received His Father’s divine benediction upon His task of saving every sinner this world will ever know. At that moment, Jesus became known forever as being the sinner’s Savior! As your Savior!!

That’s the first part of the prophecy: Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River. Now the second part of the prophecy: the Lord’s crucifixion. “When you walk through the fire (*of your crucifixion*) you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” What is most fascinating is that Jesus describes His crucifixion as a fiery baptism. Luke 12:49–50, “<sup>49</sup>I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! <sup>50</sup>I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!”

The Lord’s baptism by fire is His crucifixion on Good Friday. And yes, it consumes Him totally but only for one day. He bore the eternity of God the Father’s wrath against sin during those six hours when He suspended between heaven and earth. Jesus suffered a sinner’s judgment and a sinner’s death. The Lord became a messy Messiah in the Jordan River; He became messier still on Calvary’s cross. His sacrificial death is the final and complete payment for humanity’s sin. And it spells eternal defeat for death and the devil. Isaiah’s prophecy declares that this fiery ordeal does not destroy Jesus forever. The Lord rises again from the dead on third day, thus securing forever, our invincibility. In Christ Jesus, we are safe and secure now and forever.

One thing that we must always do is keep our Lord’s baptism and His crucifixion together. The one leads to the other. They inform each other; they work in tandem to accomplish the Father’s redemptive plan for the universe. Jesus went through a baptism of water and a baptism of fire in order to save you and all His beloved people. Isaiah even prophesies about our resurrection in today’s OT reading. Because Jesus goes through the His watery and fiery baptism, we are given the prophetic promise

that we too will overcome in resurrection triumph. Listen to these words again (vs. 5–7). It is the Father speaking to His Son through Isaiah:

<sup>5</sup>Fear not, for I (*the Father*) am with you (*the Son*); I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. <sup>6</sup>I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, <sup>7</sup>everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.

On the Last Day, that great day, all who are connected to Jesus will be raised from the dead in resurrection splendor. And so we shall live forever in body and soul in the glory of the new heavens and earth. The promise and the prophecy go together. Because of what Jesus did in His baptisms of water and fire, we are made invincible in Jesus. Nothing in this life or the life to come can separate us from God's eternal love given to us through Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.