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The Baptism of Our Lord (Series B)

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Text: Mark 1:4–11

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

One of the most provocative definitions of sin is anything – a thought, word, deed, intention, or action – which creates disorder and chaos. That's what sin does; it brings chaos where there should be peace, order, and calm. Think about it in your own life for a few moments. What has sin done to your life? Destroyed peace? Promised fulfillment only to give a guilty conscience? Or destroyed friendships and other meaningful relationships? Sin brings disorder and chaos because it's a violation of God's good and gracious will for our lives.

One of the most provocative definitions of the Gospel is the message that God brings order out of chaos. It's what God delights in doing, bringing order from disorder, life from death, righteousness out of unrighteousness, peace from strife. This delightful action and habit of God is seen from the very beginning and I really mean the beginning. Look at today's OT reading from Genesis 1, "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" (vs. 1–2a).

The earth was chaotic and disordered in the beginning. The word "form" indicates structure and purpose. For example, music that is without "form" is grotesque noise. Poetry without proper structure is incomprehensible nonsense. The condition of the primeval universe was a formless, void out of which God brought order, beauty, and perfection.

Look at vs. 2b–3, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." The disorder of darkness was vanquished as the Holy Spirit hovered over the primordial chaos and God the Father speaks light into existence. The ordering of creation is demonstrated on the 1st day with light being formed into Day and darkness into Night. This ordering work of creation continued over the next 5 days until the Lord rested on the 7th day. Bringing order from disorder, beauty from ugliness, righteousness from unrighteousness, sanctity from profanity, this is the glorious work God delights to do! This is true in the work of creation, the glory of humanity's redemption, and the majesty of the new creation on the Last Day.

Keeping this divine habit of bringing order from disorder in mind, we might better understand what's going on in the Lord's baptism in the Jordan River and Paul's teaching in Romans 6.

Mark begins his gospel with the baptism and ministry of John the Baptist. No Christmas story, just baptism, preaching, repentance, and the promise that Someone is coming who is greater than John and who will give the ultimate grace of the Holy Spirit. John preached to sinners who needed to repent of their sins and get ready for that Someone who will give them the Holy Spirit. John's water baptism was for sinners. Remember what I said sin does? It brings chaos and disorder, guilt and shame. John's baptism was for people who knew that sin had messed up their lives. It was "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins": turning away from sin, with all its chaos and disorder, and seeking after God's truth, beauty, and love. This baptism prepared you for Someone who would forgive, restore, and renew through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

And who should show up for this baptism but Jesus. If there was anyone who didn't need to receive a sinner's baptism it was Jesus. But here he is...descending into the waters of the Jordan River. The Lord Jesus identifies Himself with us disordered sinners; He takes our sin, our dysfunction, our chaotic lives, our shame and degradation into Himself. Jesus becomes the sinner of sinners, the Lamb of God who will take the world's sins to the judgment of the cross and leaves them all behind in resurrection victory.

The waters of the Jordan River become like the chaotic waters of the primordial universe. The Holy Spirit descended upon those original waters and brought order to the creation. In our Lord's baptism, the Holy Spirit descends upon the Lord Jesus as Jesus was still dripping wet to mark Him as the one who brings order to this chaotic world. In fact, it's in the Lord's baptism, that Jesus begins the work of the new creation.

All things are being made new. The OT prophets describe the Messianic kingdom as a renewed creation where the greatest of all disorders, death, is forever vanquished. For the wolf and the lamb eat together and the lion eats straw like an ox (Is. 65:25). What we consider normal, the strong preying upon the weak, some feeding off the life of others, reflects the disorder of what's gone wrong with God's creation. This world wasn't supposed to experience death.

And the Lord Jesus steps into human history and more specifically, the waters of the Jordan River, in order to establish a new creation that will only experience the fullness of divine order, love, beauty, harmony, and most important, eternal life. The Baptism of Our

Lord is the beginning of a new creation; heaven and earth are changed because of what Jesus did in that simple act of faith and devotion.

Mark emphasizes this dramatic change in his retelling of the Lord's baptism. Our English translations don't help us to see it however. In vs. 10, the English says "And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove." That's a much too bland translation. The Greek is much stronger, almost violent. A more literal translation goes like this, "And suddenly when He was coming up out of the water He saw the heavens ripping apart and the Spirit, as a dove, descending upon him..." The Lord's baptism ripped heaven wide open!

With heaven torn apart, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus so that He can begin His work of bringing order and structure back to the universe. Don't underestimate what is taking place in the Jordan River; this is a cosmic event.

What begins in the Jordan is finished on Calvary. For there too, another ripping apart takes place. Mark records that the curtain in the Temple was ripped apart (15:38) when Jesus died. He uses the same word in both references thus linking them together in a most significant and profound way. The Holy Spirit-anointed Jesus shreds the disorder and chaos of this fallen creation in order to reestablish a new creation that will forever exist in His own righteousness and strength. Sin and death and disorder and chaos will never be able to enter the new creation for it's established in the perfection of the Lord Jesus. And what does God the Father have to say about what Jesus is doing, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased."

It all glorious and beautiful. But the last time I checked, we still live in a very fallen, chaotic world. My sin continues to disrupt my own life. You, I'm sure, continue to struggle with the effects of sin reaped in your life. And were we not shocked this week yet again with the beastliness that man can descend into with the events in Paris?

The apostle Paul, in Romans 6, makes a very powerful conclusion that should resonate to the depths of our souls. Through our watery, Trinitarian baptism, we are connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus. In other words, you and every baptized believer, at this moment in time, are connected to our Lord's baptism in the River Jordan as well as His crucifixion and resurrection. These are words that you should memorize and recite openly and verbally quite often. Romans 6:3-4, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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.” That “newness of life” is the language of the new creation!

On this side of eternity, we walk in the tension of living in this fallen, chaotic world while at the same living in the undying, new creation vitality of the Lord Jesus. What Jesus established in His baptism and death and resurrection finds residence in your own hearts, minds, and souls. Before my very eyes sit citizens of the new creation!

Are you not filled with the Holy Spirit? Yes indeed. For the Spirit descended upon you in your baptismal waters. And are you not well-pleasing to the Father? Yes, for you are baptized and connected to His well-pleasing Son, the Lord Jesus. It is because we are baptized into Jesus that we are not to give our lives over to the chaos of sin. Paul concludes in vs. 11, “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Divine order, goodness, truth, beauty, righteousness, peace, and joy have been recreated in your lives. You are a new creation in Christ Jesus. That’s who you are dear saints of God. Jesus ripped heaven open for you! The Holy Spirit descended upon you and the Father spoke on your behalf. It’s settled. You are a new creation. This we know to be true by faith. We will experience this truth in all its fullness and glory in the great resurrection of eternal life on the Last Day, at the 2nd coming of the Lord Jesus.

Until then...you walk in the newness of life given to you in the Lord Jesus for you are alive to God in Christ Jesus.

✠ 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.