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St. John's Lutheran Church – Kimball, NE (Dual-parish service with Immanuel)  
The Baptism of Our Lord (One-Year Series)  
January 7, 2018 @ 7:00 p.m.  
Text: Matthew 3:13–17

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

Baptism is revelation; that is, it reveals the truth. At His baptism in the Jordan River, the truth of who Jesus is, is revealed. He is the Son of God the Father almighty. He is the anointed of the Holy Spirit. This man Jesus is the well-pleasing Son of God sent from heaven into our flesh to be our Savior.

This morning's Epiphany service focused upon the Child who was Savior of all nations of the world. This evening's service focuses upon the God-Man, Jesus, and what He came to do in order to fulfill His divine mission of being the Savior of the nations. All you need to know about Jesus – who He is and what He did for you and me – can be discovered in our Lord's baptism recorded in Matthew 3. To grasp fully how important Jesus' baptism is, we need to take a quick look at the baptism which was administered by John the Baptist in the Jordan River.

Earlier in Matthew 3, we learn that John was preaching in the Judean wilderness a sermon that could be summarized in one sentence: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" Matthew tells us that the people of Jerusalem, Judea, and the region around the Jordan went out to be baptized by John, confessing their sins. John's baptism was a baptism for repentance and faith. Repentance is that life-long attitude of God's people in which we are constantly turning away from sin and hungering for God's righteousness and holiness. Repentance is the daily garment that we wear as Christians. For we are called by God our heavenly Father to forsake the corruption of sin and iniquity and follow after the beauty of holiness.

John's baptism was for sinners. Only those who had sins need come to the Jordan. Only those who needed to repent need be baptized. This was a baptism for sinners who know their sins and works of iniquities make them subjects fit for God's wrath and judgment.

Maybe you can see why John was so surprised to see Jesus come to Jordan as a baptismal candidate. This is all wrong; it's all backwards. John protested. "I need to

be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” (vs. 14). Pay careful attention to how our Lord answers John’s objection. Vs. 15, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Jesus isn’t a sinner and He needs no repentance. But the sinless Son of God must be baptized to fulfill God the Father’s righteous plan to save the world. Don’t miss the divine necessity here. Jesus must be, must be, baptized to fulfill all righteousness.

Wonder of wonders. Sinners came to John’s baptism to get rid of their sins; Jesus came to John’s baptism to take on sins, the sins of the world. In the Jordan’s waters, Jesus is becoming our substitute. He is standing in our place in order to rescue us from the domination of the devil and to redeem us from the corruption of sin and death. That is the truth being revealed in our Lord’s baptism.

Jesus is baptized with a sinners’ baptism. By so doing, He reveals Himself to be the sinner’s Savior. The sinless Son of God becomes THE sinner in the Jordan River. This baptism marks Him for a sinners’ death on the cross. Such is the amazing love that God has for us. Jesus, the eternal Son of God took the initiative and did what was necessary to save this lost world. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And if He is to take that sin away, He must carry it in His body to the cross. The apostle Peter describes it like this in I Peter 1:18–19, “...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”

Our Lord’s baptism in the River Jordan was “to fulfill all righteousness.” Not to be baptized by John, not to be crucified, not being resurrected on the third day would have been easier for Jesus, but it would have been unrighteous on His part. The preaching of our Lord’s baptism, of His passion, death, and resurrection, are so often rejected as foolishness to the world. Silly, old-fashioned, medieval ideas that are just as well left in the past. But for us, these things are our hope and joy and confidence.

Did not the apostle Paul write these words that reflect our glory in Christ’s Gospel? “But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

Therefore, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boars, boast in the Lord’” (I Cor. 1:27–29).

Don’t be afraid of our Lord’s gifts nor despise the new life He promises. Jesus will not cast you aside or discard His redeemed children when everything seems to fall apart. Every day for Christians is living out God’s gracious gift of Baptism for we constantly walk in repentance. The newness of Christ’s resurrection life fills us so that we consider ourselves “dead to sin and alive to God” (Rom. 6:11).

I would like to conclude this sermon by quoting from C.F.W. Walther, the first president of the Missouri Synod. This is from a sermon he preached on New Year’s Day in 1845. May his encouraging words be a source of joy and victory for us too!

“For baptism is a bath that washed me not only once when I received it—washed me pure with Christ’s blood—but it continuously washed me clean even daily for as long as I hold it in faith. For just as that same water of the flood drowned the sinners, but Noah with his relatives were brought to salvation and carried to Mount Ararat, so also did the water of my Baptism drown my sins, but my soul was brought to the eternal mountain of divine grace. And just as once those same waves of the Red Sea, which swallowed up Pharaoh and his army, were a protective wall for Israel, so also has my baptismal water swallowed up all my damnation and is for me a sure wall before God’s wrath and punishment...

“Now then, all of you who believe in God’s Word, let your watchword for entering the new year be this: “I am baptized!” Although the world may laugh at this comfort...nevertheless, abandon any other dearly held pledges and speak only throughout the entire year to come, in all terrors of conscience and necessity through sin and death: “I am baptized! I am baptized! Hallelujah!” And you shall prevail! In every time of need, you will find comfort in your Baptism; on account it Satan will flee from your faith and confession; and in death you will see heaven opened and will finally come into the joy of your Lord to celebrate a great year of jubilee, a year of praise, with all the angels forever and ever. Amen!” (C.F.W. Walther, taken from *Treasury of Daily Prayer*, p. 1078; a sermon for New Year’s Day).

✠ 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.