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The Baptism of Our Lord (Series A)

January 8, 2017

Text: Matthew 3:13–17

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

In my judgment, the Epiphany season is one of the most important seasons in our liturgical calendar. It puts meat on the bones, so to speak, of Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter. Advent/Christmas teaches us that Jesus is the long-anticipated Savior of the Nations. To be sure, He is conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary; the very Son of God made flesh. Lent/Easter teaches us what the Savior does to save His people from false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. He bears the sins of the world as God's Lamb who must sacrifice Himself in love to save His beloved people. He rises from the dead, never to taste death again.

The Epiphany season is sandwiched between Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter. This season unveils all the more who this Virgin-born Son of God is. The Epiphany season reveals to us the cosmic, universal scope of the Savior's death and resurrection. All things are made new in Christ. Epiphany is the season of light, joy, and revelation of who Jesus is.

The Epiphany of Our Lord continues today with the Baptism of Our Lord. I find it absolutely amazing that Jesus' public ministry begins with baptism in the Jordan River. No flashy miracles happen, no men are called to discipleship, no large public teaching sessions. All those things will occur but only after Jesus is baptized.

Make no mistake about it, dear saints of God, Jesus' public ministry begins in the baptismal waters of the Jordan River. Likewise, the Church's ministry really begins and continues with baptism. Infants/children are baptized with the intention that they will be instructed in Holy Scripture as to the present and eternal significance of their Christian baptism. Adults are instructed prior to baptism so that they can receive that great gift with much joy and rejoicing as they begin their lives of discipleship. And to those already baptized, the Church admonishes, instructs, encourages, rebukes, and upholds them as God's redeemed children claimed by Jesus in Holy Baptism. What that means practically speaking, is that I never speak to you *only* as men, women, and

children created in God's image – as glorious as that is – but I always speak to you, pray for you, minister to you, and treat you as baptized saints of the living God.

Jesus goes to be baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River in order to begin His ministry; in those waters the revelation of who Jesus is and will do become brighter. We've already learned from the various Christmas readings that Jesus is God's Son, born to be the Savior of the nations. He took upon Himself our human nature: And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn. 1:14). His name, given at 8-days old, describes what He is to do: save people from their sins. Our Lord's Baptism reveals what kind of Savior from sin He will be. In the Jordan River, Jesus receives a sinner's baptism. In other words, He's the kind of human-divine Savior who becomes one of us by taking upon Himself our misery and sorrows, our guilt and shame, our sins and iniquities. John's baptism was a baptism for sinners. Jesus receives our baptism forever marking Him – anointing Him – the Savior of sinners.

Hear this well, dear saints of God. Jesus came for everyone alienated from God by their sins. He came to call those held in bondage to corruption in thought, word, and deed. That's the people Jesus came to save. If you want to know Jesus, you must be numbered among that group of people. The resurrected Jesus established a Church that is to be filled exclusively with baptized, forgiven, redeemed, sanctified sinners. It seems we forget this most basic, profound truth. At times, we act as if our lives are all in good order with no problems, hurts, or anxieties, much less real sins that need real forgiveness. The Lord Himself taught that He didn't come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance and that only the sick need help from a physician (Mt. 9:13, Mk. 2:17, Lk. 5:32). To be a Christian is to be classified with that group of people whom our Lord came to call as His own. And thanks be to God, our Lord didn't turn away from a baptism that anointed Him as the Savior of sin-sick people needing a divine Physician.

Speaking of anointing...Jesus is marked to be that kind of sinner-saving Lord. Vs. 16–17 describes Jesus' anointing by the Holy Spirit, “And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’”

Every time you call upon the name of Jesus in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, you are calling upon the beloved, Spirit-filled, well-pleasing Son of God who came to save sinners by becoming numbered among sinners. His baptism in the Jordan River marvelously illustrates that for us.

Such is the radical love of God for us. He didn't wait for us to ask Him. He took the initiative and did what it takes to save a lost world.

Jesus' baptism foreshadows His dying a sinner's death on Calvary. It was a sinner's baptism that marked Him as the Lord who would die with our sin that we might live by His righteousness. Not to be baptized by John, not to be numbered among sinners, not to be crucified, not being resurrected on the third day would have been much easier for Jesus, but then He wouldn't be our Savior.

Jesus' baptism in the Jordan marks Him as the One who would die for our sins. Our Baptism in God's name marks us as those who have died to our sins. This is what St. Paul marvelously declares in Romans chapter 6, "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" (vs. 3–4).

We are marked – anointed – for eternal life. And we mustn't think that we'll ever be cast off by our Lord. The prophet Isaiah describes Jesus as the Spirit-anointed Servant who will not break a bruised reed or quench the faintly burning wick in 42:3. Jesus will not cast you aside or discard His redeemed children when everything seems to be falling apart.

"Paul tells us that our Baptism is connected to Jesus' baptism. 'We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death' (Rom. 6:4)...It is made clear that everything that happened to Christ and through Christ when He died became ours when we were baptized. Christ died for us. He redeemed us from our sins. Now we are united with Him. What He did is now ours...That means we are united with Christ. We will grow together with Him all our lives. Just as He rose up to live a new life, we also rise up every morning and live with the Resurrected One. We live through Him and for Him. That is the meaning of our Baptism" (Bo Geirtz, *To Live with Christ*, p. 96).

Every day for Christians is living out God's gracious gift of Baptism. Our minds are forever being renewed by the Holy Spirit. The affections of our heart and soul are being reshaped in conformity with the heart of Jesus as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. We are a new creation, old things have passed away. The newness of Christ's resurrection life fills us so that we consider ourselves "dead to sin and alive to God" (Rom. 6:11).

The Lord Jesus was plunged into the waters of the Jordan so that in our Baptism we might be covered in the righteousness of Jesus. Included in our baptismal liturgy is Martin Luther's Flood Prayer. In this prayer, we pray to God the Father saying, "Through the Baptism in the Jordan of Your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, You sanctified and instituted all waters to be a blessed flood and a lavish washing away of sin" (LSB p. 269). What Jesus did in the Jordan River continues in each and every Christian baptism. "We have, therefore, no greater jewel in body and soul. For by Baptism we are made holy and are saved. No other kind of life, no work upon earth, can do this" (LC IV:46).

Oh what joy and grace are shown to us in Jesus, the Holy Spirit anointed, well-pleasing, beloved Son of God the Father who was numbered as one of us so that He could save and bless each and every one of us. A blessed and joyous Baptism of Our Lord to you all, dear baptized saints of God ...

✠ 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.