

Sermon for Jan. 10, 2021 The Baptism of Our Lord.

Today's gospel: Mark 1:4–11

⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son;^[a] with you I am well pleased."

+++

Grace mercy and peace to you from God the Father of us, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Today we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. Christmas is over and we have entered into the season of Epiphany on January 6th.

As Epiphany is the season where we recognize the divinity of the Christ child born into the world, it is appropriate for us to celebrate this special event. And if at first that is not immediately obvious why this day is important in the church, I'm not all that surprised, any more than the day you were baptized should be singled out for you. But it *should* be, because something of profound consequence happened to you on the day of your baptism. On that day, you were saved from sin, death, and the power of the devil. And if that sounds too strong to your postmodern ears, then let me say it this way: On that day the Lord put his name on you and connected you to the promise of his salvation. And if we are to believe the Word of God -- and WE ARE -- you also received the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is nothing more -- nor less -- than FAITH... faith in the promises connected to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

This is the Great EXCHANGE: Jesus took our sins, and WE received his righteousness.

The righteousness of God with comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all those who believe; [Rom 3:22]

We find this exchange spelled out for us here in the 6th chapter of Romans.

³*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were **baptized into his death?** (Romans 6:1–11)*

We were baptized into Jesus... and Jesus was baptized into US. When?

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. (Mark 1:9)

That's as much as Mark tell us about that even but Matthew tells us a little more...

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River. He came to John, wanting John to baptize him. But John tried to stop him. John said, "Why do you come to me to be baptized? I should be baptized by you!"

Jesus answered, "Let it be this way for now. We should do whatever God says is right." Then John agreed.

Baptism was John's idea... or rather God's idea that John implemented.

*(Jesus then asked the Pharisees) John's **baptism**—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'*

John's baptism is not the same as the one we received. John is the last of the Old Testament prophets, and this is a baptism for the SINNER. John is clear about this, charging the scribes and pharisees with hypocrisy, saying in Matthew 3, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee the coming wrath? Produce the fruits of repentance!"

John's baptism was for those who KNEW they were sinners and needed to repent. When Jesus shows up on his doorstep, asking for John to baptize him, John initially refuses... "You need to baptize ME... I do not need to baptize YOU... You are the Christ. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This baptism is for SINNERS."

Jesus doesn't give him a long explanation, but simply tells him that it is NEEDED to FULFILL the Law of God's righteousness. And so John submits. Jesus goes into the font, so to speak, the holy one of God. And Jesus emerges covered in our sins, identified with US, poor miserable sinners who are under the penalty of death. If you want to pinpoint the moment when Jesus takes upon himself the sins of the world, I submit that this event is likely when it took place.

The point of contact even to our own baptisms is that God the Father from heaven announces who Jesus is...

"My Son whom I love." (Mark 1:11)

From this moment on Jesus is a dead man walking. And we are going with him to the cross.

Jesus even calls this HIS baptism... His WORK...

"But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!" (Luke 12:50)

And from Mark 10:38:

Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

The disciples say they can. But Jesus has to agree that they will, because they will also be martyred for his sake.

But even then, this baptism is connected to Jesus' DEATH on the cross. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans...

*4We 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.
5For if we have been united with him in a death like his,
we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:4-5)*

And that is the Great Exchange... Jesus' baptism in the Jordan... His identification with sinners. In this he suffers OUR punishment, he takes OUR death. In the waters of OUR Baptism we are, likewise, made DEAD to sin and raised to a NEW LIFE, just as Jesus is ALSO raised up from death. He identified with US, so that WE could be identified with HIM... and receive HIS name and HIS life and even HIS inheritance.

All this is WORTH OUR TAKING NOTICE OF TODAY.

*6We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that
the body of sin might be brought to nothing,
so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (Romans 6:6)*

Let me rephrase that last sentence in modern English...

*6We know that our sinful nature, our OLD-MAN, (corruption) ALL THAT was crucified with him
in order that the sin which is inherent within our bodies would not be able to crush us in
death... We are by nature sinful and unclean... and that should be our very doom. But --WE are
no longer the SLAVES of SIN. Sin is NOT our master. We have been set free.*

Or reading from St. Paul...

7For one who has died has been set free from sin. (Romans 6:7)

Rejoice in that. At a recent funeral for a beloved member of this church, I said that the man I knew in this life was an incredible man to know. Dynamic, and informed, creative and industrious... I knew this man as a sinner and he impressed me. I can't begin to imagine what he will be like when he has been set free from the bondage of sin! And this verse tells us clearly we will no longer have to contend with the brokenness of sin... because Jesus took the penalty for sins away.

*8Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.
9We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again;
death no longer has dominion over him.
10For the death he died he died to sin, once for all,*

but the life he lives he lives to God.

¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:8-11)

There is encouragement to rejoice in the second chance we have been given. It's more than a second chance, even. It's nearly *endless* chances as the grace of God covers it all.

Does that mean we can indulge in sinful behavior because it won't be held against us?

Well, that is how chapter 6 of Romans begins, asking that very question and the answer is... *of course not!* Why would we abuse the grace of God? Are we not a grateful people? Did Jesus set us free so that we COULD SIN all we wanted to? Nonsense.

He set us free to be his people and his people put sin away. Is that easy? No. Are we going to be successful at doing this completely? No. But our desire and continued attempts at holding ourselves to law, to high standards and not giving into temptations is our GOAL.

We do not stop. Like those who give up smoking.... we don't quit quitting. We repent, and we begin again. And we do not become weary of the battle with sin. OK, sometimes we do. But that is why we gather in worship, to support and encourage and be reminded how important it is to be the children of God. We are family in Christ... brothers and sisters. There is purpose in being the body of Christ. And there is joy and consolation for the broken hearted and beaten down. Let us rest today, in the gifts of God's grace.

Amen