

Quinquagesima Sunday - The Baptism of Our Lord
St. Matthew 3:13-17: "You Are All Sons of God."
February 10/11, 2018 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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1. Baptized into Thy name most holy,
O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
I claim a place, though weak and lowly,
Among Thy seed, Thy chosen host.
Buried with Christ and dead to sin,
Thy Spirit now shall live within.

2. My loving Father, Thou dost take me
To be henceforth Thy child and heir;
My faithful Savior, Thou dost make me
The fruit of all Thy sorrows share.
Thou, Holy Ghost, wilt comfort me
When darkest clouds around I see. *Amen.*
(*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary 242, vv. 1-2*)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the third chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" / But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. / 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." ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who fulfilled all righteousness for you, dear fellow redeemed:

In the home where you grew up, how often did you hear the words, "I love you"? Did you and your siblings ever say it to each other? Did your parents say it to you? Did your parents say it to each other? These words can be said so much that they are hardly noticed. Or they can be said so little that love is questioned. This is like when Lena asked Ole after thirty years of marriage if he loved her any more. Surprised at the question, Ole said, "Of course I do! I told you so on our wedding day!" As you know, it is not safe in a relationship to assume that the other person knows what you are thinking. Thoughts must be shared and communicated, even if it isn't always comfortable to do so.

But it seems that we are at a disadvantage when it comes to communication with God. He knows all about us. He knows when we sit down and rise up. He discerns our thoughts from afar. Even before a word is on our tongue, He knows what we will say (Ps. 139:2,4). He knows what we are thinking, but how can we know what He is thinking? He says He had a plan laid out for our life even before we took our first step (Eph. 2:10). But what is that plan? Is there any way to find out?

There are some who try to discover the hidden will of God. They are always on the lookout for special messages and special dreams from God to guide them in making life decisions. Some say they can hear the voice of Jesus in their heads, or that they can feel the Spirit leading them in one direction or another. Wouldn't it be nice to have a relationship with God like that? But more often than not, what people perceive as the voice of God is actually the voice of their old Adam or even the devil.

God does not think the way we do. This is exactly what He says, *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts"* (Is. 55:8-9). There are hidden mysteries of God that cannot be understood in this life. There are answers that must wait until heaven. So is there no way to know what God thinks about us?

I

We wish the Father spoke to us like He did to His Son. After Jesus was baptized, a voice from heaven said, *"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* God the Father could not have been clearer about His thoughts toward His Son. Jesus could go ahead with His saving work knowing that He had His Father's approval. And why wouldn't the Father approve of Him? Jesus was perfect.

But perfect, you and I are not. We are far from perfect. God gave us good to perform, and we did evil. He gave us work to do, and we shunned it. He gave us laws to follow, and we broke them. John the Baptizer did not mince words about people like us. *"Bear fruit in keeping with repentance,"* he cried out. *"Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire"* (Mt. 3:8,10). Have you produced good fruit? Have you produced enough of it?

You and I are plagued with the daily evidence of our inadequacy. Yes, we put on a cheerful attitude at work, but our hearts are full of judgment toward our co-workers. Yes, we feed and clothe our children, but we don't always view them as blessings. Yes, we voice our commitment to our spouse, but we let ourselves indulge in fantasies about others. Yes, we say we are thankful for what we have, but we secretly wish we had what others do. As much as we try to watch what we do and what we say, we struggle to control our thoughts. And the harder we try to control them, the more we are aware of our failures.

We shouldn't imagine for a moment that our sins are somehow hidden from God. He knows about every last one. This is why we wouldn't mind some reassurances from Him. We would like to know that He still loves us and is not angry with us. We want to be sure that we are not outside His grace, and that He will take us to heaven when we die. Is there some message He could send to make this clear? Yes! In fact, He has many comforting messages to send our way.

One of them is recorded by the evangelist Matthew, a message detailing the baptism of Jesus. What is confusing about this account is why Jesus thought He needed to be baptized. You and I know that one of the blessings of baptism is the forgiveness of sins. But Jesus had no sins to be forgiven. So why did He want to be baptized? John wondered the same thing. Jesus told him, *“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”* Jesus was baptized *“to fulfill all righteousness.”* It was not to gain righteousness for Himself; He was already perfect.

Jesus stepped down into the waters of the Jordan River for you, to take up your sins. When your hands are dirty, you go to the sink and let the clean water wash all the dirt away. The opposite happened to Jesus. Though He was perfectly clean, He let the sins of the world be poured out on Him at His baptism. This includes your sins, even the sins of your mind. Each sin was poured upon Jesus, and they stuck there. Now they were His to carry, and He would not be relieved of them until three years afterward when He breathed His last on the cross.

But Jesus did more for you at His baptism than taking up your sins. He also left His righteousness in the waters of baptism. He left His righteousness, so that when sinners are baptized, His righteousness sticks to them and stays with them as long as they remain in Him. The Apostle Paul writes, *“For our sake [God] made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”* (2Cor. 5:21), and *“as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”* (Gal. 3:27).

II

So at your baptism, you *“put on Christ.”* You were covered in Him. What was His, became yours. His holiness, His atoning blood, His victory over death—all of these were given to you. By baptism, you were buried and raised with Him (Rom. 6:4). You were born again to new spiritual life (Ti. 3:5). You are not as you were before; you are a new creation (2Cor. 5:17).

God looks at you differently now. He does not see you covered in your sins, cowering in the kingdom of darkness. When He looks at you, God the Father sees His Son. He sees His obedience and His perfect righteousness. In you, He sees a beloved son, with whom He is well pleased.

Baptized into Christ, one with Christ by faith, you truly are a son of God. And why is it important that you are called a “son”? Why not a “daughter” of God, or simply a “child”? Those terms are fine, but “son” expresses something more. It was the firstborn son in a family who stood to inherit what belonged to his father. It is as the father told his oldest son, who pouted about the warm reception given to his prodigal brother—the father said, *“Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours”* (Lk. 15:31).

All that God the Father has is yours through faith in His only-begotten Son. Jesus your Brother is not jealous about the kindness shown to you by His Father. He gave Himself in your place, so you would have this glory and joy. He was willing to do this because He loved His Father, and He loved you. He gladly took your place in the depths of sin, so you could have His place in the heights of heaven.

Jesus is the proof of God’s love for you. You will never be certain of His love if you wait for Him to send you special, personal assurances of it. If you wait for an “I love you!” to boom

down from the clouds, you will be waiting a long, long time. The place to hear God speak to you is not in your head or in your heart. It is in His Word. This is where God's love in Christ for all sinners is made crystal clear.

This love was personally bestowed on you in your baptism. In baptism, you did not choose God; He chose you. He made an undying commitment to you, which He will never forget and never break. Through those waters, you were incorporated into the body of Christ, as so many other blessed sinners have been throughout history. You were brought into the family of God, and placed alongside Christ as an heir of His eternal blessings.

This is where you stand with God, and where you will continue to stand by faith in His Son. Your humble repentance for your sins will not be met with a cold shoulder or with burning anger. Those sins were put on Jesus, and His righteousness was put on you. You are baptized into Christ. Your sins are forgiven. "[F]or in Christ Jesus **You Are All Sons of God**, through faith.... And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:26,29).

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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