

The Baptism of Our Lord – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Matthew 3:13-17: “Jesus’ Baptism Reveals His Person and Purpose.”
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In Nomine Iesu

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Merciful Lord, You received me as Your own through holy baptism, and You continue to be faithful to me. Give me grace to hold fast to You as my God and Father and to confess Jesus Christ as my Savior, who has washed and cleansed me from all sin. Help and strengthen me all the days of my life, until you bestow on me the inheritance that is laid up for all who trust in Your beloved Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (adapted from *Meditations on the Gospels*, CPH, 2009)

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 written in 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. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who put His forgiveness and righteousness in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, so that the Father is well pleased with us His children, dear fellow redeemed:

One of the most remarkable things about the life of Jesus up to the point of His Baptism is how little we know about it. We learn about His birth, His circumcision, and His presentation in the temple as a little baby. We hear about the visit of the wise men and how He had to flee with His family to Egypt when He was under two years old. We hear about His journey to Jerusalem and sitting among the teachers in the temple when He was twelve years old. And that’s it. We know nothing more about His teenage years or twenties beyond the summary recorded by the evangelist Luke: “*And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man*” (2:52).

That tells us that Jesus was respected by the people around Him. We know He never got in trouble, at least due to a wrong of His own, because He was without sin. He spent His days serving His mother Mary and guardian Joseph and helping His neighbors in need. It is shocking how mundane this seems. We are so used to Jesus active in teaching and miracles, that we have a hard time picturing Him in Nazareth as a regular citizen of the town. But there is a comfort here, too, that in all the time Jesus was living this mostly anonymous life, He was redeeming our lives by His perfect keeping of God’s Law.

And now the time had come for His true nature to be revealed. He traveled from Galilee to where John was baptizing at the Jordan River and stepped down into the water. When John saw Him, he said, *"I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"* That is a strange statement. At another place in the Gospels, John made it clear that he did not know who the Messiah was until His Baptism: *"I myself did not know him,"* said John, *"but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel"* (Joh. 1:31).

We know that Jesus and John had met before. John leaped in his mother Elizabeth's womb when her relative Mary, pregnant with the Christ-Child, greeted her (Luk. 1:41). We assume that more visits between the two families followed through the years. This may be why John had a positive view of Jesus and considered Him to be superior to himself. But having great respect for Jesus was different than recognizing Him as the Messiah.

John saw Jesus in a completely different light after Jesus was baptized. When Jesus came out of the water, the heavens were opened, the Spirit of God descended in the form of a dove and came to rest on Him, and the voice of God the Father said, *"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* If the townspeople of Nazareth were present that day, they would have stood there wide-eyed. They would have said then what they said later: *"Is not this Joseph's son?"* (Luk. 4:22). How could Jesus be the beloved Son of God?

But He was! All four evangelists record this event which shows its significance. Nowhere else in the Bible do we see the distinctiveness of the Persons of God depicted so clearly. There stood the Son, upon Him came the Holy Spirit, and from heaven spoke the Father. And yet, these three Persons were still one God. One God from eternity. One God in power and glory. One God over all—always Triune, one God in three Persons.

Once he saw the Holy Spirit come down from heaven upon Jesus, John knew this was the Christ, this was the Savior. He told everyone who would listen: *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!... I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God"* (Joh. 1:29,34).

The event of Jesus' Baptism and John's eyewitness testimony were recorded so you would know who Jesus is. He is more than a man; He is not just the Son of Mary. He is the Son of God. His Baptism was the beginning of His public work, His anointing by the Holy Spirit to His three-fold office as Prophet, High Priest, and King. The Father also left no question about Jesus' Person. He said, *"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"*—His holy, perfect, eternal Son.

So His Baptism reveals Jesus' Person, but what about His Purpose? We are baptized, and we bring our children to be baptized, because of our sin. We go to the font for *"the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit"* (Ti. 3:5). We go to be cleansed *"by the washing of water with the word"* (Eph. 5:26). We go to be buried and raised with Christ, so we might *"walk in newness of life"* (Rom. 6:4).

But Jesus needed no regeneration and renewal. He needed no cleansing. He had no need of a new spiritual life because He was perfect. What prompted Him to go to the Jordan River to be baptized? Even John questioned why He should need to do this. And Jesus replied, *"Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."* He was baptized not to have sins of His own taken away but to impart His righteousness.

Many theologians have described Jesus' Baptism as a great exchange. He stood there in the water at the beginning of His public work to have our sins poured over Him. And He went forward as a spotless Lamb to the cross, so that His righteousness would be poured over us. Our sins for His righteousness—that's the great exchange. Everything Jesus did in obedience to His Father from His Incarnation to His Baptism to the Cross was "*to fulfill all righteousness.*"

He came to redeem every bit of your sinful life from the moment you were conceived in your mother's womb and inherited original sin (Psa. 51:5), to the moment you take your last breath. Jesus left nothing undone. He fulfilled every tiny detail in God's holy Law. He missed nothing. He said, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished*" (Mat. 5:17-18).

He verified that He did everything He set out to do when He said from the cross, "*It is finished*" (Joh. 19:30). The fulfillment of God's Law was complete, and so was the payment for all sin. By becoming a Man, the Son of God put Himself under the Law to keep it in every sinner's place. And He had a body and soul that could suffer the wrath of God against sin on our behalf. This was God the Father's plan, and Jesus willingly and perfectly carried it out. "*For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2Co. 5:21).

This righteousness was poured over you and credited to you at your Baptism. Some Christians who misunderstand Baptism regard it as little more than a ritual, a ceremony or tradition of the church that has no power in it. "It is just something external," they say, "but what really matters is the decision you make in your heart for Christ." But Jesus does not give us empty rituals. He gives us powerful Sacraments for dispensing His eternal gifts.

After His resurrection, He commanded His Church to "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*" by baptizing them and teaching them (Mat. 28:18-19). His apostles did this; they baptized sinners of all ages from all kinds of backgrounds. And the Church has continued to do this until the present day. Baptism is the primary means by which sinners are brought into the holy Christian Church and made members of the body of Christ.

Everything you needed to get to heaven was given to you at your Baptism. Galatians 3:27 says, "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" If you have "*put on Christ*," what do you lack? What more is there to add? If you have been buried and raised with Him, receiving the benefits of His death and resurrection (Rom. 6:4), what else could you need? All of this came to you as a gift from God.

But it is possible to lose this gift. This would happen if you no longer believed that the Jesus who stepped down into the Jordan River and was nailed to the cross on Calvary is the true Son of God. Or if you no longer believed that He did everything necessary to win your salvation, and therefore did not "*fulfill all righteousness*" for you.

If you do not believe in Him, then you are on your own. Then you have to answer for every bad thing you have done and for every righteous thing you have left undone. If your sins were not

put on Jesus, then they are still on you. If His righteousness was not imparted to you, then you have no righteousness that counts before God.

It is vitally important to have a clear understanding about the gifts God gave you in Baptism, how He made you His own through those waters and changed the course of your life from destruction to deliverance. Jesus' Nazareth neighbors had a hard time seeing Him as anything more than a man, but His Baptism revealed Him as the true Son of God on a mission to redeem the world. Your neighbors may look at you in the same way, as no different than anyone else.

But through Baptism, you became a true son of God and an heir of His eternal kingdom. You became a member of Jesus' holy body, which means you are going where He your Head has gone. You are no longer stuck in your sin and destined for eternal death. You have been raised with Christ, you walk in newness of life even now, and you look forward to the eternal joys waiting for you in the Lord's holy presence. For this we say...

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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