

January 8, 2023
The Baptism of our Lord
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 3:13—17 (Romans 6:1-11)

BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE SON, AND GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

At the beginning of the new Church Year calendar, time seems to move fast. We have already gone through the seasons of Advent and Christmas. This past Friday, January 6th, we celebrated the Epiphany of Our Lord, beginning of the season of Epiphany. The word *epiphany means “to make known, to reveal”* or *“to make manifest.”* (BDAG, 1048) In the Church we use the term when speaking of different events in the earthly life of Christ Jesus’ when His true identity is revealed as God in human flesh, the Messiah and Savior of the world.

Friday we remembered how God revealed Himself in the flesh of a child to Gentile wise men who, by faith, followed God’s guiding star to Bethlehem, signaling that Jesus is the Savior of all people: both Jews and Gentiles. (cf: Luke 2:30–32)

Today we commemorate the Baptism of our Lord where God’s own Son is made known at the Jordan River, marking the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry. So, why would God’s own Son come to John to be baptized? Even John the Baptist was puzzled. Our text says:

“John would have prevented [Jesus], saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me.’” (Matthew 3:14)

After all, John’s baptism was a baptism for the forgiveness of sins and Jesus was without sin.

The reason is, our God is holy and righteous and sinful humans like you and me cannot stand in His holy presence. Only the righteous can. And the only way that the unrighteous can be made righteous and be saved was for Jesus to be baptized. Our holy God is merciful – but He is also a just God. Because of His justice, He requires punishment for sin. And since the wages of sin is death, someone had to die if you and I were to be saved of our sins.

In His infinite love, God sent His Son to dwell among us to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus, the sinless Son of God, stands with sinners in the waters of the Jordan River and receives the baptism that is meant for sinners because He is One who will bear their sins, taking their place, upon Calvary’s cross where the righteous One will offer up His own life as the ransom payment for the unrighteous. As St Paul writes:

“For our sake [God] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

At the Jordan River Jesus was revealed as God's own Son. But He is not the only Person revealed at the Baptism. The entire Holy Trinity was revealed. The Jehovah's Witness will tell you that there is no such thing as the Holy Trinity. Others will say that the word Trinity is *not* found in the Bible. Well, it is true, the word Trinity is not found in the Bible – but that does not mean that Holy Scripture does not teach the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

In our Gospel text this morning, we see scripture's clearest picture of the Holy Trinity. It says as Jesus went up from the water:

“... the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16–17)

God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are each revealed separately. Three Persons – but still one eternal God. Unlike the pagan religions of the world, we worship the eternal Father who has revealed Himself in sending His Son Jesus Christ and in the showing of His Holy Spirit. (cf: Chem, *LTh* 1:51) This is the Trinity that Lutheran Christians hold so important.

The Holy Trinity is a big deal. Jesus makes this clear when He gave His instruction on how to make disciples. Before His ascension into heaven:

“... Jesus... said..., ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.’ (Matthew 28:18–20)

How are disciples made? By baptizing and teaching Jesus' Word. And just as the three persons of the Holy Trinity were present at Jesus' baptism, they were present at yours. At the font you were marked with the sign of the cross and Baptized: ***“In the name of the Father and of the ~~✠~~ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”*** At that very moment, the Holy Spirit worked faith in you. Your Old Adam was drowned, by contrition and repentance your sins were forgiven, and you were made an heir of all God's gifts and His heavenly kingdom.

The Trinitarian Name and the sign of the cross always go together and they always point to your Baptism. As you heard in our epistle reading, in Baptism you were united to Jesus' death and resurrection. Your old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be brought to nothing and you would no longer be enslaved to sin. (cf: Romans 6:3–8) And just as sure as Christ was raised from the dead, you too will one day walk in the newness of life. And so you do not forget it, you are frequently reminded of the Trinitarian Name and the sign of the cross by which you were marked in Baptism.

You are gathered here this morning before God to receive His gifts by virtue of your Baptism. If you ever looked in your hymnal, right before the Invocation, there are little red letters that say, ***“The sign of the cross may be made by all in remembrance of their Baptism.”*** So we begin our worship remembering our Baptism, making the sign of the cross and invoking the Trinitarian Name saying: ***“In the name of the Father and of the ~~✠~~ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”*** Then following your confession of sins, your pastor, in the stead and by the command of Jesus

forgives you your sins: ***“In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.”***
By virtue of your Baptism, your sins are forgiven.

Many Lutherans feel that making the sign of the cross is too *“Catholic.”* But, making the sign of the cross can be traced back to the late second century – before Roman Catholicism had evolved into a distinct branch of Christianity. Luther writes in his Small Catechism that this is:

“How the head of the family should teach his household to pray morning and evening. ‘In the morning, when you get up, make the sign of the holy cross and say, “In the name of God, the Father, the ✠ Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.”’
(cf: CPH’s Sm. Cat. p.30, 2017 ed.)

The sign of the cross reminds you of the mighty power of God in the washing of water with the Word. It is the very sign that marked you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. That baptismal mark is still valid. It is not that you *“were”* baptized. But, you **“ARE”** baptized! Baptism is not a human invention but a divine institution. It is not a work of man but God’s work of cleansing the unrighteous. It is a priceless treasure that He gives and you receive by faith.

And perhaps one of the most overlooked sections of Scripture that describes God’s work in Baptism is Ephesians chapter 5 where St Paul describes the relationship between a husband and wife. When it is viewed in light of the sacrificial love of Christ, marriage is a picture of Christ and His Church. (cf: Ephesians 5:22–32) Beginning in verse 25 Paul writes:

“²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25–27)

How did Christ love the Church? How does Christ love you? The sinless One of God stands with you, taking your place, bearing your sin, fulfilling all righteousness, giving Himself up for you so that he might sanctify you, cleansing you by the washing of water with the Word, so that you might be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that you might be holy and without blemish.

It is all baptismal language. Holy and without blemish are qualities of Christ Himself. And this holy marriage between Christ and His Church involves an ***exchange of goods*** between the Bridegroom and the bride: all that is His becomes hers (His holiness without blemish), and all that is hers becomes His (her every spot and wrinkle). (cf: Winger, Ephesians, Concordia Commentary, 614)

It is a blessed exchange: Christ takes on humanity’s sin and imputes His own righteousness to all who believe. Death has been changed into life, destruction into eternal salvation, and sin into righteousness. It is all God’s doing and He does it in the washing of the water with the Word. At the font you became God’s own child.

“... he saved [you], ... not because of works done by [you] in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on [you] richly through Jesus Christ [your Savior...” (Titus 3:5-6)

The sinless Son of God, stood with sinners in the waters of the Jordan River to receive the baptism that is meant for sinners because He is One who bore your sins and took your place in death on the cross. He suffered the punishment for the sin of the whole world, that all the wages of the sins of the whole world might be paid. God placed your sins on Jesus. Your salvation was won on the cross, but His work of redemption is credited to you in your Baptism. True repentance is daily returning to Baptism. It is your daily garment, by which you drown the old Adam and grow up in the new Adam, being clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.