

January 7, 2024
The Baptism of Our Lord
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Mark 1:4-11 (Romans 6:1-11)

JESUS RESCUES YOU IN BAPTISMAL WATERS

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

Every once in a while, you'll hear a heroic story of how someone jumps into a river or lake to rescue a stranger who is drowning. Sometimes, by the time the victim is dragged out of the water onto the shore, they are unconscious or even dead. CPR is required to restore them to life. Whether you realize it or not, that heroic story is part of your story. No. You're not the hero but the victim. You're the one who was facedown, dead in the water, and needed rescued. Thanks be to God that He sent His Son Christ Jesus to jump into the waters of sinful humanity to rescue us and bring us back to life.

It all began when:

“John [the Baptist] appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” (Mark 1:4)

St. Luke tells us that from John's childhood until he began his public ministry to Israel, John lived in the wilderness. (cf: Luke 1:80) He dressed an Old Testament prophet, clothed in camel's hair with a leather belt, and eating a diet of locusts and wild honey, and he spends all of his time preaching to the people in the wilderness near the Jordan River. Lots of people.

“... 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.” (Mark 1:5)

The time had come for God's last prophet to do what the Father had planned centuries before. Prepare the way for the Lord. The promised Savior was about to be revealed. The fact that so many people were coming out to John to be baptized reveals that God was also at work in the hearts of the people. This great multitude of people shows that God had given John some powerful tools: God's Word and the blessing of Baptism. He didn't dazzle the crowds with a feel-good sermon. His message was simple. He declared that the people's sinfulness was separating them from God. In fact, they were walking dead, dead in their trespasses and deserved nothing other than judgment and hell for their sins.

John's Baptism wasn't an “*outward sign of an inward faith.*” No, this Baptism was a real means of grace for the forgiveness of sins. It didn't bestow the Holy Spirit as Christian Baptism does. But it was a preparatory Baptism, preparing God's people for the coming of their Lord. (cf: Voelz, Concordia Commentary, Mark 1:1–8:26, 116) The multitudes of people coming to John were not there to show their faith and demonstrate that they already had the forgiveness of sins.

They went out to hear God's Word and turn to Him in repentance to receive the forgiveness of sins.

In the original language, "**repentance**" means "**turn about.**" (BDAG, *Greek-English Lexicon*. 640) "**Change your mind.**" (TDNT, 1000-1001) Let's say you're driving down the road and you see a sign that says, "*You're going the wrong way!*" The sign would be God's Law preaching to you. Repentance is the result of the Holy Spirit working through the Law of God clearly telling you that you're going the wrong way in your thinking, in your life, in your faith. The Law shows you that you're a sinner deserving eternal damnation for your transgression. The Law is the knock in the head that makes you turn about face and change your mind. Change your mind about your sin and flee from it because your desire won't bring satisfaction or fulfillment. With every temptation to sin, there is always the deception that it'll bring something good, some benefit, some fulfillment. But when you fall into the sin, you find the opposite is true. You experience guilt, emptiness, and shame. Unfortunately, that's not always the case with everyone.

There used to be a stigma connected with sin. Sins were committed in the darkness and hidden away because if they came to light, there would be guilt and shame. Things have changed. Now our society celebrates sin. They're more apt to rub their sins in your face as if daring you to say there's something wrong with their sinfulness. There's no end to the transgressions that are committed. Some are still done secretly in the darkness, but many others are freely committed out in broad daylight for God and everyone see.

There're two kinds of sinners in the world. The **one kind** the world embraces. They're hailed as role models because they're pushing the limits, or they're being discriminated against. We're told, "*They're just doing what makes them happy. Leave them alone because they're not hurting anybody.*" That sinner is hardened in their transgression and unless the Holy Spirit can change their mind, their eternally dead.

The **other kind** of sinners are the sinners at the Jordan River. They're not trying to fool anyone. They're not trying to push limits or social agendas. They're not looking for personal pleasure, or fame and fortune. This group is sorrowful and contrite. They're ashamed of what they've done and who they've become. They're humbly confessing their weaknesses and their wrong doings. They're essentially saying, "*I don't do why I do what I do. I don't know why I keep doing it. What I do know is that my sin is literally killing me and I need God to take my sins away.*" One by one, they come forward and John baptizes them with the Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

It was a crowd of sinners of all stripes, those such as you and me. But there was one exception standing in the crowd. Our text says:

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

Jesus is **everything** they are not. They're sinful – He is sinless. They're weak – He is **strong**. They're temporal – He's **eternal**. They're unrighteous – He is **Holy**. Their sins are offensive to God – **He is God**. It's the difference between day and night. His Name is Jesus. Accept no substitutes – true God and true man. He's the only One who ever lived who didn't need to repent. Yes, Jesus' Baptism was different in that sense. He knows He's different but that doesn't keep

Him away. He comes to them, not to brag upon Himself, showing how much better He was. No. He came for them. He came to rescue them. He came to rescue you and me – and He was baptized by John.

It was God's will that Jesus come in the flesh to restore creation as He had intended it from the beginning. At His Baptism Jesus was anointed as the Messiah, for He alone is qualified to save mankind from their sins. As He came up out of the water the heavens were torn open as the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, anointing Him with power as Jesus embarks upon His mission of salvation. And at the same time, God the Father speaks from heaven, pronouncing His approval on His beloved Son and His saving mission saying:

"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:11)

So, why did Jesus get baptized? Baptism is for sinners and losers and the dregs of the earth. The Son of God doesn't need Baptism. He has nothing to repent of. He doesn't need forgiveness. He is without sin! So why was He Baptized? His Baptism marks the beginning of His ministry of salvation for all mankind. His Baptism reveals that God was acting to keep his promise, sending the Savior. At His Baptism, Jesus identifies with sinners and was anointed to bring good news and salvation to all. While sinful human beings receive Baptism that day at the Jordan for the forgiveness of sins, the only sinless Human who is also God's Son received Baptism as the One who would take all sins upon Himself. As He steps out of the Jordan River, He steps out not as one forgiven, but as ***the Forgiving One***. In the words of St Paul:

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

Many Christians think that although man is born as a slave to sin, there's a way of escape. They think, *"Sure, I might have sinful thoughts and do sinful things, but if I try hard enough and do the right things, I can escape from this slavery."* But that's not what the Bible teaches us. Now, it is true, before Baptism, you and I were enslaved in sin. We were not only enslaved, we were dead in our trespasses. There's one thing we know about some who is dead. The dead can't do anything – because they're dead! Sure rigor mortis and decomposition will set in, but those are not actions of the dead person. They're a function of a chemical process within the muscles and body tissues. To be completely dead is being unable to give yourself life. When someone is completely dead, not even the greatest doctor in the world can bring them back to life. The ***only*** way one can be brought back to life is if Jesus makes you alive. That is exactly what Jesus has done.

Jesus knows of mankind's sinfulness and need of forgiveness. He knows that mankind is as good as facedown, dead in the water, and needs to be rescued. Mankind cannot save themselves, but He can save them. He came to be one of them. Born of Mary, He became flesh. In His Baptism He comes to take your place. As your sins are washed off in Baptism, they're washed onto Him. He carried your sin to the cross, and died for them there, winning victory over your sin, your death, and your grave.

In our epistle text, St Paul writes:

“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.” (Romans 6:4)

This is why Lutherans make a big deal of Baptism. Baptism isn't an “*outward sign of an inward faith*.” It's not a work of man. It's a work of God. In Holy Baptism, God has united you to Christ's death. His death for your sin. Paul continues:

“For 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 6:5)

In Baptism, Jesus takes the forgiveness that He won on the cross and gives it to you.

“...the wages of sin is [still] death...” (Romans 6:23)

Apart from Christ you would suffer God's wrath and eternal death for your sin. But for those who are baptized into Christ Jesus, they have been given forgiveness. And with His forgiveness comes:

“...the free gift of God [which] is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
(Romans 6:23)

Jesus stands in place of all sinners. At the cross He made your sin His *sin*. He made your *death* His *death*. At the font God unites you to Jesus' *death* and gives you *life*. He felt the pain of the flogging, the nails, the wrath of the Father. In Baptism, you only feel the splash of the water. There's no pain because the wrath is done and gone. It all sounds simple and easy. But don't take this gift for granted. You are baptized at the cost of Jesus body sacrificed and His blood shed, so that you don't have to suffer God's wrath and pay the price of your sin.

So dear baptized believer, you don't have to live in your sin any longer. Repent. Turn about. Change your mind about your sin and flee from it. In Baptism, God has made you His own. For the sake of Christ Jesus, the Father delights in adding you as His beloved child in whom He is well pleased. All that Jesus has is yours because if you are God's child, you are:

“... heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...” (Romans 8:16–17)

... of all the gifts that Christ won for you on the cross. All of it is yours now and will be forever because you God's own child in Baptism.

Amen.

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