

Matthew 3:13-17

“Fulfilling All Righteousness”

The Baptism of Our Lord (First Sunday after the Epiphany)

January 12, 2020

First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.

Pastor Peter Adelsen

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

The twelve days of Christmas have long passed. Emmanuel was born in a manger in Bethlehem. The wise men have given their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh and have gone home. The 12-year-old Jesus astonished His earthly parents and the teachers at the Temple.

Today, we find Jesus as an adult. We find Jesus at the very place where people have been confessing the very thing that Jesus came to save them from: their sins.

[The Inauguration]

This morning, the Christian Church celebrates the Baptism of Our Lord. On this day, Jesus began His public march to the cross for you and me.

Our text begins saying, **“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him”** (Matthew 3:13).

Now, everyone in line to be baptized by John was there in response to John’s message: **“Repent!”** That is, everyone except Jesus.

So, why is Jesus there? Well, Jesus is there for the same purpose: in order to be baptized by John. But, why?

Does Jesus need to repent? Does Jesus need to be converted from unbelief to faith? Is Jesus among the lost sheep of Israel?

John the Baptist knows the answer. You see, John felt very strongly that it was not right for him to baptize Jesus. However, John was fine with Jesus baptizing him, for he himself was a sinner who stood in need of baptism. But Jesus? No! John said, **“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”** (Matthew 3:14).

Now, John had refused to baptize some people in the past. But, the ones John had refused before – such as the Pharisees and Sadducees. He did so because they failed to repent of their sins. They wanted to remain in their sinful ways by only focusing upon their own wants and desires. Now, here, John has the opposite dilemma: Jesus is without sin. Jesus abides in God’s Law.

As John attempts to say “no” to Jesus, Jesus breaks the tension saying: “***Let it be so now, for thus is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness***” (Matthew 3:15).

In other words, Jesus is saying: “***Allow it. Yes, this is out of the ordinary, but this needs to be accomplished, so I can be the sin-bearer.***”

At any other time, John’s argument to deny a baptism might be valid, but now is the time for Jesus to begin His public ministry.

Prior to this moment, Jesus had been living in the obscurity of Nazareth. He had been living in perfect obedience to God the Father as a man in the place of all men. But now, on the banks of the Jordan, He is publicly beginning His course that will take Him to the cross, where He will give His life as a ransom for many.

Jesus is beginning His public mission with John’s baptism to be the sin-bearer of the world. Although He had no sin, Jesus is declaring Himself to be one with sinners by taking up the burden of sin.

Here, in the Jordan, Jesus is inaugurating His public redeeming work. In doing so, Jesus is also “***fulfilling all righteousness.***”

[Jesus Chooses Us]

But, why now? Why wasn’t Jesus baptized when He was a baby? Well, Baptism was not a legal requirement in Jewish Law. Yes, there were purification rites, but none of these was a baptism.

You may ask: Is Jesus choosing to be baptized, proof that *we choose* to be baptized?

Well, Jesus did ***choose*** to be baptized. He chose to be baptized in order to save all of mankind from their sins against God in thought, word and deed.

But, for everyone else – *you and me* – we receive baptism. We don't choose God, God chooses us! In fact, we are incapable of ever choosing God on our own. As Martin Luther says on the Third Article of the Creed:

“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

This is what happens in our baptism. God is choosing us. You see, our baptism is different than the baptism of Jesus: God does the choosing. We do the receiving. He gives us faith.

You see, Christ's baptism is vicarious. He is baptized for us sinners. Through Christ's baptism, He is pointing forward to His death and resurrection as the substitute for all sinners.

Through our baptism, we become joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus. As Paul says, “*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).

When John consented and 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’*” (Matthew 3:16-17).

Here, we see all three Persons of the Triune God involved in our salvation: the Father speaking from heaven, Jesus standing in the water, and the Holy Spirit descending from heaven in the form of a dove. Here, the three in One reveal the glory of Jesus as the sin-bearer of mankind.

We hear the voice of God the Father saying, “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*” God the Father is saying this because His Son Jesus has fulfilled all righteousness, something that Jews before Him failed to do. Jesus – God's own Son – has followed the Law perfectly and now it is time for Him to be the sacrificial Lamb for all who cannot follow God's Law perfectly.

From this point on, Jesus is no longer in obscurity. He is going to become well-known by many. He will heal the sick and raise the dead. He will also gain enemies – the Pharisees and Sadducees – who don't like being called out for not trusting in God. And yet, Jesus still loves those who persecute Him.

At times, we can act much like the Pharisees and Sadducees. We may believe that we have no reason to repent and ask for forgiveness for of our actions against God, our family, our friends and our neighbors. We may even hold a grudge against someone who has wronged us, or even withhold forgiveness from them.

But, remember, it was Jesus who knew no sin – He knew no wrong – yet He came as our Redeemer.

You see, His purpose was to die in the place of all sinners, which are you and me. He died so that ***“we too might walk in newness of life”*** (Romans 6:4). He died, so that when we die, we would ***“be united with him in a death like his, [so] we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his”*** (Romans 6:5).

For God, everything has a purpose. Jesus was baptized in order to take on our sins to the cross. So, that through His sacrificial death and resurrection, our sins would be forgiven through our baptism into Christ.

[The Sacrament of Baptism]

Now, since Baptism wasn't a legal requirement under Jewish Law, how did Baptism become a Sacrament?

Well, it was not until Jesus declared Baptism a Sacrament that it became a Sacrament. This happened when Jesus said, ***“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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”*** (Matthew 28:19-20).

From this point on in the history of the one true Christian faith, Baptism has been a Sacrament. It is a Sacrament according to the command of Jesus.

Baptism is a Sacrament because Christ established it as a Means of Grace that delivers the forgiveness of sins He won on the cross. Jesus suffered, died, and rose again in order to save all people from eternal death brought about by sin. So, through His saving work, Christ purchased and won salvation for all.

At our Baptism, God the Father looked down upon us – like He did for His own Son – and said, ***“I am well pleased.”*** He is pleased, because He chose you in the waters of Holy Baptism as His adopted child to inherit the Kingdom of God.

The same goes in our daily baptismal life. You see, every day the old Adam shows up and urges us to be self-centered by not thinking of God, our family, and our friends. When we realize our fault, we are to turn to our baptism and remember our forgiveness in Christ. So, we put to death our old Adam by repenting of our sin.

Daily the old Adam is put to death, and a new person, who lives by faith in Christ, is raised up. This death and resurrection pattern is the rhythm for our daily life: we sin, we repent, we live. This is the life of a Christian. And each time we repent, God the Father looks down upon us – like He did for His own Son – and says, ***“I am well pleased.”*** He is pleased with us, because we are the Body of Christ – the Church – we were dead to sin, but now we are alive in Christ.

Now, do not be mistaken, Baptism is not magic and it is not a “get into heaven free card.” For without faith, Baptism alone has no promise of salvation. For Jesus said, ***“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned”*** (Mark 16:16). So, what is the Baptismal promise? If you are baptized and trust in Jesus as Lord, you are saved.

We are saved only through Jesus who stood in the place of all sinners. We are saved because on this day, through His baptism by John, Jesus began His public march to the cross as He ***“fulfilled all righteousness”*** for you and me. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠