

Luke 3:15-22  
“The Best News of All”  
The Baptism of Our Lord (C)

January 9, 2022  
First Ev. 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]**

We have all heard this saying: “The only news is bad news.” It is likely that you have said the same sentiment. Each time we open a newspaper, turn on the television news, or read the news online, we see a “crisis” in every headline or lede. Each day, we learn of the newly discovered ways that we are going to die: through war, crime, weather, terrorist attacks, the food we eat, the medicines we ingest or inject, and on and on.

We like to blame the news industry for holding back the good news. We like to imagine that there is a grumpy editor who uses his power to rain woe, grief, and despair on us all. But the thing is, the news publishes and broadcasts bad news, because it sells. As a former journalist, I know this to be true. If the news business thought a story about Sally getting a pony on her birthday would bring in revenue, they would publish it above the fold on page one or as the leading story on the evening news.

You see, the news business gives us what our old Adam – *our old sinful nature* – wants. Our sinful nature actually enjoys news about death, war, and famine. We want to read the stories that reveal the sickness of human nature first, and that’s why it’s always the top story. We revel in sickness, disaster, and death.

Ever since sin was unleashed, man’s evil state has never changed. The Psalmist David wrote: ***“The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one”*** (Psalm 14:2-3).

You see, on our own, we can't change our evil and sinful condition. This is because the enduring reality of our existence is that we are sinful. Though sin is not part of the very essence of being human, it is the situation we find ourselves in for all of us who were born after the Fall with original sin – *the sin we inherited from Adam and Eve*. Because of this, we are sinful from the moment we first exist as human beings. Sin is in the air we breathe. We are attracted to sin. We can never escape sin in this life.

Due to sin, we live in a natural state of unbelief as we do not trust in the One true God. Due to sin, we have hardened hearts as we live in absolute rebellion against God. Due to sin, we have a stricken conscience as the Law was written on our hearts and our hearts know we've violated it. Due to sin, we are helpless. Due to sin, we are either left in despair – *if we know our situation* – or pride – *if we don't*.

But when we realize the full extent of our rebellion against God, it is God's Law doing the work. It is then that we realize that we can do nothing about our situation. Left on our own, due to sin, we get what we deserve, that is, eternal death. This is certainly bad news, but is it really news if we know in advance?

This is the situation that Jesus enters. This is what brought Jesus down from heaven. This is what caused God to become man. This is what brought Jesus to get in line to be baptized by John. John was calling sinners to repentance. He was boldly confronting people with the truth: they were sinners who needed help and rescue. They were sinners who needed to repent. But all of this seems rather strange. Why would Jesus, who knew no sin, need to be Baptized? Well, He made Himself to be a sinner, so that in our Baptism, we could be saved from sin's power so that He might make us clean saints.

Today on this Baptism of Our Lord Sunday, the Triune God proclaims the best news of all – that through the obedience of Jesus – He has opened heaven to all the faithful through our Baptism into Christ!

### *[While Jesus was Praying]*

Oddly enough, in Luke's telling of this salvation event, Luke's gospel does not focus on John the Baptist, nor does this gospel focus on the actual Baptism of Jesus. Instead, the focus is on what happened *after* Jesus was Baptized, *while* He was praying.

As Jesus was praying, ***“the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son; with you I am well pleased’”*** (Luke 3:21-22). What a sight and what a sound! Here, we have the entire Godhead revealed as heaven opened to declare that Jesus is the Son chosen to accomplish the messianic work of salvation.

Here, Jesus is named as the Christ, the anointed One, who has come to give sinful humanity – *this same humanity that doesn’t seek after God and is utterly corrupt* – salvation from the powers of sin, death, and the devil!

As God the Father spoke, ***“You are My beloved Son; with you I am well pleased”*** (Luke 3:22), it would be remiss not to see the sacrificial overtones in Jesus’ Baptism. Recall, God testing Abraham when He said, ***“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love ... and offer him there as a burnt offering”*** (Genesis 22:2). But unlike Isaac, who was spared, God the Father would not spare His own beloved Son.

Here, at His Baptism, as God the Father puts His seal of approval upon Him, Jesus takes our place by becoming a poor, miserable sinner as He submits to a Baptism of repentance. Through a sinner’s baptism, Jesus who knew no sin of His own, now takes humanity’s place to receive the wrath against sin that we all deserve.

From this moment, Jesus stands in solidarity with sinful humanity. He gives all sinners hope! He, therefore, stands for us under the wrath of God, the wrath that will culminate in a Baptism with fire with His bloody Baptism in His crucifixion for the sins of the world.

### ***[Becoming a Child of God through Baptism]***

In being Baptized, we experience a change! Outside the Church and to the unbelieving world, Baptism is just a mere bath. Nothing more. Nothing less. But as we know, Baptism is so much more.

We know that Baptism is a bath that is different from any other bath, since in Baptism, the water is combined with God’s Word. This water also puts God’s name on us as the pastor pours water upon the one to be baptized as he says, ***“I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*** At that moment, although we can’t see it, the heavens open as God says, ***“This is My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.”***

Instead of washing away dirt, like a normal bath, Baptism washes away sin and replaces it with a new birth as a child of God. Baptism gives faith, and through that faith, Baptism delivers the forgiveness that Christ won for us on the cross.

Baptism changes everything! At one time, we were all dead to sin and doomed to eternal torment, because of our sinful nature. But through Baptism into Christ Jesus, God comes to us bringing the best news of all since we were buried with Christ by our Baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life as God's beloved child (Romans 6:4).

So, what do we do in this newness of life? Well, we remember our Baptism with the words "*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" – the trinitarian invocation. When we use those words of God's Name, we recall and confess before heaven, earth, and hell that our identity is in Christ and that in Baptism we receive: victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sins, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with His gifts.

Now that we are baptized into Christ, shall we "*continue in sin*" like the unbelieving world "*that grace may abound?*" (Romans 6:1) "*By no means!*" says the Apostle Paul. As Christians, we are to reject the notion that we should ignore God's will and deliberately sin, knowing that He will forgive. Instead, we live in repentance and faith in the Triune God, who made us His beloved child. We do this when we trust in God above all things and treat our neighbor – *everyone we meet in our daily life* – as we would like to be treated. And when we fail by not living the Christian life of repentance and faith, we ask God and our neighbor for forgiveness.

Even if we may find it difficult to forgive and forget others, God does that very act! He forgives and forgets as that sin is completely wiped away and He says: "*This is My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.*"

Imagine there was a doctor who said he could save people from death, or even if the person died, the doctor said he could restore them to life and live forever. I'm sure this doctor would soon be wealthy beyond our imagination as people would flock to him. But the thing is, we have this great gift already! In Baptism, everyone receives this good news of eternal life. You see, through Baptism and faith as we live a life of repentance, we receive the medicine that utterly destroys death and preserves all people alive.

All this happened since through our Baptism into Christ, we are linked to Christ's Baptism by John and linked to Christ's bloody baptism as He hung on the cross. Through Baptism and faith in Christ, our condition has changed, since He took upon Himself our dirty sin and replaced it with His righteousness, so that He could make us clean saints!

We will still read and watch the bad news around us, but through Holy Baptism, we have received the best news of all that through Christ, heaven is open to you and me, since our sin is forgiven! Now set free from sin, we are now alive to God in Christ Jesus!

Our condition has changed! Because of this, God the Father now says of everyone who is baptized and trusts in His Son: *"This is My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased."* Amen.

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

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠