

What do the waters of baptism and the waters of a tsunami have in common? At first glance it wouldn't seem like they have much in common at all. Last Monday, on New Year's Day a 7.6 magnitude earthquake struck just off the coast of Japan. Because the earthquake took place on the ocean floor and so close to land, a Tsunami warning was issued immediately. Thankfully, there was not much of a Tsunami to speak of from this earthquake. Certainly nothing like the one that struck Japan after an extremely powerful earthquake back in 2011. I vividly remember watching videos on the news that showed all kinds of debris including cars, overturned boats, and even entire **houses** being swept away in the rushing waters.

Last Monday's earthquake sadly resulted in the loss of 126 lives and 200 people still missing. The earthquake and Tsunami of 2011, though, tragically resulted in the death of over 19,000 people. Both of those events snuffed out lives and did billions of dollars' worth of damage. There can absolutely be no doubt, tsunamis are extremely deadly.

Holy Baptism, on the other hand, far from destroying lives, most definitely **saves** lives for all **eternity!** Thanks be to God So, what in the world does a Tsunami and Christian Baptism have in common? Looking at the results from another famous Tsunami gives us the answer: For those of you who were around back then, do you recall the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami? That catastrophic event had at least one beneficial result in the midst of such catastrophic losses: In parts of India, the tsunami of 2004, the great shifting of the waters unearthed previously unknown archaeological sites. For a few minutes, after the water had receded far from the shore and before it came raging back as a tsunami, fishermen standing along a beach on the Indian coast saw the remains of ancient city that had since been buried under the ocean. During those few moments they gazed in awe upon ancient temples and hundreds of large blocks all briefly exposed before the sea swallowed them up again.

In that sense you could say that the tsunami was **revealing**. And that is the common ground it has with the water of baptism. Our reading from Mark's Gospel today teaches us that baptism reveals that Jesus is God's Son, the world's Savior. It also reveals that **we** are God's beloved children. Let's take a closer look at baptism in this **revealing** text!

And who **better** to teach us about Baptism than John the Baptist, himself. Besides his distinct camel-skin robe and interesting organic diet of locusts and honey, the thing that set John apart from the other preachers of his day was his

baptizing. The opening verses of Mark's Gospel make that clear. Mark wrote: "John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4).

Although God called John to preach in the wilderness instead of the cities and villages, his message still found a very sizable audience. Verse five of our text says that all of Judea, including the people of Jerusalem, went out to hear John. The first century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, estimated that as many as 300,000 people went out to listen to John preach! That's approximately the number of people who today live in our state's capital city! Among those coming out to this peculiar preacher were some of the religious leaders from Jerusalem.

Then there were some fishermen from Galilee, men like Andrew and John the son of Zebedee, disciples of John the Baptist and later disciples of Jesus. Finally there was a certain 30 year-old carpenter from the village of Nazareth.

While the religious leaders from Jerusalem would have stood out with their flowing robes and haughty manner, the carpenter from Nazareth, a man by the name of Jesus, looked just like any other man come to take in the wild-eyed preacher of the desert. That's surprising considering what John had been saying about Jesus. John told the people that there was one coming who was greater than he, whose sandals John was not worthy to stoop down and untie (Mark 1:7). That reality about Jesus, that He was someone very special, was revealed at His baptism.

As Jesus came out of the water after having been baptized by John, all **heaven** broke loose. The skies parted and the Father who had first spoken at Creation spoke again saying: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (v.11). The Holy Spirit who had hovered over the waters at creation now descended above the waters of the Jordan River in the form of a dove. At the center of this great spectacle stood the carpenter's son from Nazareth, Jesus. So, **what** in heaven's name was going on? **Heaven** was being opened and heavenly **realities** were being revealed to all the people: This carpenter from Nazareth, was in fact the only begotten Son of God!

But, if Jesus really **is** the Son of God, why did He get baptized? Even John the Baptist struggled with that question. When Jesus first asked to be baptized, John refused and rightly stated that he needed to be baptized by Jesus. John knew that he was a sinner, and that Jesus was not. So, what was Jesus doing getting baptized?

Think back to the first time you ever slept in a tent as a child. Did you do that all by yourself? No. I'm sure your dad, mom, or an older sibling slept in the

tent with you. It was their way of assuring you that you had nothing to worry about. If lions and tigers and bears were going to attack your tent, well, your tent-mate was there to protect you. You were in it together. When Jesus asked to be baptized, He was doing something very similar. He was taking His place among the people He had come to save. Jesus was letting the world know that He, the Son of God, had come to stand **with** sinners, not stand in **judgment of** them. Actually, He came to stand in our place, to take on our sin, and to bear our punishment. So, Jesus' baptism not only reveals that He's God's Son, it reveals that He's the **Savior of the world**.

Jesus revealed how important baptism is by being baptized Himself and later on He commanded baptism for all people of all times and places (Matthew 28:19-20). And a baptism that happens today is just as revealing as Jesus' baptism. That's because what happened at Jesus' baptism still happens in our baptism. When the water is poured over a sinner's head and God's Word is pronounced, all heaven breaks loose as the Holy Spirit descends on that person to create or to strengthen faith (Acts 2:38, 39; Titus 3:5-7; John 3:5, 6), and God the Father says: "This is my child whom I love. With whom I am well pleased." The holy God can claim us sinners as His children because baptism really washes away sin. The forgiveness we receive there is as real as the water dripping down the forehead.

But what sins exactly does baptism wash away? **All** of them! Not just the ones committed before baptism but also the sins we commit after baptism. That can be a huge comfort to us when the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature to tempt us to question our standing before God. After getting us to fall into sin, for example, Satan will point to our grumpiness, he will denounce our lustfulness, he will condemn our greediness and then ask how dare we claim to be a child of God? We can be so bold and so right in claiming to be a child of God because that's what God made us to be in our baptism. Baptism is God's declaration to us, not our promise to Him. When a child is adopted, she doesn't take any oaths about being faithful to her new family. She doesn't pay any legal fees to join the family. The adopting parents make that oath of love and faithfulness to their adopted child and pay the legal fees to seal the adoption. In the same way, when we doubt our standing with God we just need to look back on our baptism and remind ourselves of what happened there. The Holy Spirit came to us, and God the Father said with certainty: "You are my child!" The Father makes that declaration because His Son, Jesus, paid for our adoption with His own blood shed on the cross.

What does it all mean? Does our baptism give us the green light to go and do whatever we want to do, no matter how bad? After all, if all of our sins have been forgiven, even the future ones we will commit, what difference does it make the way we live? When Satan tempts us to think that way, we need to remember and take to heart John the Baptist's message. He preached a baptism of **repentance** not a baptism of **recklessness** (v.4). When the Sadducees and Pharisees came out to John to be baptized with no remorse over their love for money and power John said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:7b, 8). If these religious leaders were truly sorry for their sins and desired the forgiveness God offered in baptism, they would have turned away from their sins. Since they had no intention of doing so, God's judgment remained on them. It's the same thing whenever we excuse our disrespect towards our parents, teachers, or any other authority or if I insist that it's my right to grumble and complain all I want about life. When we act this way, we actually turn our back on God's forgiveness. To keep us from falling into this trap and staying in this trap, God sends Holy Spirit to us through His Word to turn us away from those attitudes and to remind us of who we are through baptism: God's children, not Satan's.

Although the December 2004 tsunami may have revealed some new archaeological sites, that's little consolation for what else those waters did. 220,000 people died because of one wave! That goes to show how powerful water is. But even the massive destructive power of a tsunami pales in comparison to the amazing **constructive** power of God's gift of Holy Baptism. With a few handfuls of water all **heaven** breaks loose as God revealed Jesus to be His Son, the world's Savior. And with similar handfuls of water heaven opened at **our** baptism as God revealed that we are indeed His beloved children, forgiven of all of our sins and given the awesome gift of eternal life with Him! Since we truly have become children of God, we will turn away from our pride, our stubbornness and all other sins and live as the children God has declared us to be in our baptism. Amen!