

THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD (B)

Mark 1:7-11

January 8, 2012

The Rev. Peter C. Jacobson, STS

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Wichita, Kansas

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Everything the Lord Jesus does, he does *for us*. He takes up our flesh, he is born of a woman, to fulfill the Law *for us*. He is circumcised, and presented in the Temple with sacrifices offered on his behalf, and he eats the Passover *for us* — to end all those things.

The Law is fulfilled in him. His circumcision and naming, his perfect obedience to the Father, his ritual purity counts for those who are joined to him in Holy Baptism.

The same is true of the moral law. He kept it *for us*. His fasting and temptation were done in our stead. He fulfilled, what you and I were unable and unwilling to fulfill. His sobriety, his self-denial and discipline — they count for you.

But that's not all. He not only kept the law, he also suffered all the consequences due, to those who do not keep the law. Indeed, the one who knew no sin, became sin. He suffered in the agony of his soul. The guiltless one, was reckoned guilty, in your stead and mine. The one with no need for a sacrifice for atonement, became the great once-for-all sacrifice for the atonement of all sin.

All this that *you* might be forgiven and have salvation.

And thus it is that in today's Gospel, Jesus stands in the river separating the wilderness from the Promised Land, and John the Baptist washes him in the waters of the Jordan. Jesus surely does not need this Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus does not need these waters of cleansing and humility. No, but he submits to them *for us*. His Baptism is our Baptism. His Baptism is your Baptism.

The water does not sanctify him. No, instead, *he sanctifies the water*. St. Ephrem the Syrian was a fourth century Church Father and deacon in the Church. He wrote the following about the Baptism of Our Lord:

Seeing [Jesus] approach,

John stretches out his hand to hold him back protesting:

Lord...How can you wish to submit to [my baptism]?

But the Lord replies, I wish it to be so.

Come and baptize me;

do as I wish, for surely you cannot refuse me...

By my baptism the waters will be sanctified,

receiving from me fire and the Holy Spirit.

Unless I am immersed in them

they will never be empowered to bring forth children

to eternal life.

The water that falls off Christ's back then, flows into all the fonts of the Church — of every age and place. The water from Christ fills our fonts with pure, holy, life-giving water — rich and overflowing in grace. For this one who stands in the Jordan is the Word made Flesh. And he makes baptism to be **Baptism**. He makes Baptism the sacrament that it is. He makes it to be the fountain of grace.

This Word crucified and risen is combined with and included in the water. This living Word creates and sustains the faith which receives all of his benefits. This water connected to the Word, saves by the power of Christ's resurrection. This water has joined you to Jesus — burying you in **his** death, and raising you by the glory of the Father in **his** resurrection.

You were baptized into him. And the very name of God was applied to you: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You are branded with that name. You belong to him.

Christ's Baptism, **his** anointing, **his** inheritance — now they are all **yours** as well. The heavens opened **also** upon you. The Holy Spirit descended **also** upon you. And when the Father proclaimed, "You are my beloved son — you are my beloved daughter; with you I am well pleased," he wasn't just talking about Jesus. No. **Because** of Jesus, God was also talking about **you!**

Now, there is no one to accuse you. The righteousness of God has been served. The payment for sin has been paid in full. And you go free.

But not back to your old haunts of sin and bondage. No. You go free to the mansions of heaven — to the life of grace. For you are a member of the royal household, a member of the royal priesthood. You feast on the heavenly banquet with brothers and sisters, those still here and those already moved ahead of us — the Church militant and the Church triumphant. You rest secure in the ever prevailing mercy of God's love in Christ Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, we are brothers and sisters **in Christ**. It is Jesus who joins us together, and it is Baptism which has joined us to him.

You are **not** those who **were** baptized. No. You are those who **are** baptized. You **are** washed. You **are** clean. You **are** pure. Soon it will be evident to everyone, and all of creation groans as in the pangs of childbirth, eagerly awaiting it.

For now of course, it is not always so obvious. There are tragedies — both those self-inflicted, and those simply suffered at the hands of a broken world. There are dark passages and depression. There is an uncertain future and a turbulent past. Children walk into school with guns. People die from starvation and privation. Life is snuffed out by terror, and by our failure to intervene and lend a hand. People are abused and neglected. Addictions cause great pain and suffering. Illness and old age are relentless. And loneliness is all around us.

But let not your hearts be troubled. Do not rest on the subjective, fleeting

things. Do not rest on things that come and go, on feelings of happiness or sadness, neither on feelings of worry or uncertainty. Rest instead on the objective, historical reality of Jesus' death and resurrection, and on the objective, historical reality your *inclusion* in his salvation through your Baptism. Trust in the infallible, never-failing, never-fading Word of God. There is your hope and your certainty! *You are baptized!* God has chosen *you*. And he promises to love you and care for you. He promises to protect you and provide for you. He declares, "your sins are forgiven." And that is enough!

And soon enough, the fleeting things of this life will be removed. You will see clearly, as you were meant to see. Then you will be free inside and out, as your heart in faith already is. Then your joy will be complete.

Until then, do what Jesus says: eat his Body, drink his Blood, and listen to and follow his Word. That will be your strength. That will be your refuge. That will be your fortress, and your might. That will see you through to the coming day. His Body and Blood, his Word—they will comfort and console. They will feed and nourish. They will endure.

You are baptized.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

