

"Baptism Now Saves You" Baptism of Our Lord 2022 Matthew 3:13-17

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

“Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.””

Today is the Day of the Baptism of Our Lord. That being the case we’re obviously going to focus on the topic of baptism. Sadly, it’s a bit of a contentious subject among Christians since we don’t all hold the same view about baptism, what it is and what it does, and what it doesn’t do.

We've just come through this Christmas season with all of the family gatherings and celebrations. When you gather around the table with family, who have come from near and far, for a Christmas feast, religion is usually a pretty good topic for discussion, don’t you think? I’m kidding, of course. Remember, there are two subjects that create tension in a room really fast, politics and religion.

When I was at the seminary, a fellow seminarian came back to campus from Christmas break. I think we were in our second year. He had been back home enjoying Christmas overseas with a lot of his extended family. He told me they all sat down for the Christmas meal

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and someone across the table said, Dave (I've used fake name to protect the identity of my friend). Dave, I bet you've never been slayed by the Holy Spirit, have you? Dave was taken aback by the question to say the least. The family member who asked the question knew that Dave had been baptized as a child with water, but he wasn't sure that Dave was really a Christian. You know, a speaking-in-tongues, miracle working Christian.

Baptism is one of the doctrines of the Church that seems to divide us as much, or, perhaps more, than any other. You have those who hold to a "believers baptism" only. For these folks, baptism is a sign of their having chosen to follow Jesus. It's a mark, if you will, of membership in the Church. When you hold such a view of baptism you have to exclude children because, well, because person who can't choose to follow Jesus shouldn't be baptized.

At the same time, you have those who believe that God imparts all sorts of miraculous powers in baptism. God slays you with the Holy Spirit, such that you essentially live out your life in this world on another plane, a higher plane. You can speak in tongues. You can heal people with your touch. The sins that used to plague you and rob you of joy are now mastered as you exercise the new power of holiness that

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God gave you in baptism. You become, as it were, a super Christian, a big C Christian among a bunch of other little c christians.

As I say, today is the Day of the Baptism of Our Lord. We have before us Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism. As we read and reflect on the passage, we find that it teaches us a great deal about baptism. We find too that it gives us insight into the way the apostle's, and, in this case, John the Baptist, understood baptism. We're going to turn to John's understanding of baptism in just a minute, but let me make a general point first. When you read the Scriptures, your primary goal is to try to understand them as a 1st century listener would have understood them. In other words, context is vitally important. The Scriptures were not given in a Post-Enlightenment world. That said, faith in Christ was not seen, nor was it understood as an intellectual exercise. Rather, faith, as Paul said to the Christians in Ephesus is "the gift of God and not as a result of works, lest anyone should boast."

That said, we return to John the Baptist to see how he understood baptism. Jesus came to him at the Jordan river to be baptized. John said, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" "I NEED to be baptized by you." Where is the NEED in baptism if it is a merely a sign of one's confession of faith? Not only did John recognize his NEED to be baptized, as the Scriptures say elsewhere, "for the forgiveness of

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sins," he also recognized how strange it was that Jesus should ask to be baptized by him! John, we are told, "preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." How is it that Jesus should come to him to be baptized?

Many people find Jesus' baptism a bit mysterious. I mean, on the surface it does seem a bit odd that Jesus would be baptized when baptism is "for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus, remember, was and is without sin. Certainly, He bore in His body the sins of the whole world when He died on the cross. But He had no sin of His own. As such, He was the perfect Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. So, how is it that Jesus asked to be baptized by John?

While the baptism of Jesus is recorded in all four of the Gospel's, only Matthew gives us this little detail added detail as to why He was baptized. John objected, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" And Jesus responded, saying to John, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he (that is, John) consented."

The entire Bible is really about sin and righteousness. It's about the contrast between our sinful brokenness and God's purity and holiness. While many people think they'll stand one day before God on the basis of their own goodness, they are, to say the least, sadly

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mistaken. "No man can see God and live," the Scriptures say, because the contrast between His purity and our sinfulness is so vast, it's so great, that we would literally be destroyed if we stood before Him in such a corrupted manner.

Jesus though, was baptized "to fulfill all righteousness." Just as He was crucified in a substitutionary manner, that is, as God's Lamb who bore the sins of the world, so, in His baptism, to fulfill all righteousness, the sins of the world, including your sins and mine, were laid upon Him. In a sense, Jesus' baptism was the opposite of your baptism. In your baptism, God took away your sin and He declared you to be holy and righteous by the merits of His dear Son. In Jesus' baptism, the Father imparted the sins of the world to the Lamb who would take them, as a willing sacrifice, to the cross. Paul, who wrote extensively about the substitutionary atonement of Jesus, summarized it beautifully, saying, "God made Him who knew no sin, to be sin, that you might be the righteousness of God in Him."

When Jesus came up out of the water, "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." Jesus bore in His body the sins of the whole world and the Father was pleased. He was pleased

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because the reconciliation of God and man was in place. Though no one else was obedient to the will of the Father, His Son was "obedient unto death, even death on a cross."

As we close this morning, we realize that the Father says the same thing to us that He said to His Son. "You are my beloved son. You are my beloved daughter. In you I am well pleased." You see, in your baptism you were made an heir of the Kingdom of God. You are God's dear son, or, daughter. And Christ is your intercessor. What the Father says of the His Son, He now says of you! Amen.