

Sermon for January 10, 2016 - 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany: The Baptism of our Lord

Luke 3:21-22 (NIV84)

Theme: **Jesus' Baptism reveals Him as . . .**

- 1) Completely like us: *True man*
- 2) Totally unlike us: *The divine Christ*

<sup>21</sup> *When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened* <sup>22</sup> *and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

"You just wouldn't understand!" Have you ever said this to someone trying to help? Why? Was it because you were too embarrassed to admit a sin? Maybe you truly felt like they would not understand the temptation, trial or pain you were going through because they have never been in your shoes. And, if they haven't experienced it, how can they help?

Now let me ask you another question: have you ever felt this way about Jesus? Sure, we pray to him all the time, but do we truly believe that he "gets" us: that he actually understands all the trials and temptations we face – and, on top of this, has the willingness and power to help?

We should because, as we will learn in our sermon for today, **Jesus' Baptism reveals Him as both completely like us** (and therefore able to sympathize with our weaknesses) *and also totally unlike us* (having the power to forgive our sins and give us final victory in all our trials). Let us then learn to call upon him in every trouble and need.

Part One: Jesus' Baptism reveals him as completely like us: true man!

One complaint often lodged against pastors is that they can't really understand the problems lay-people face at work and at home. And, in a certain sense, this is true. We don't face the threat of unemployment hanging over many workers during a down economy. We don't face unbelieving coworkers who mock us for our faith, or atheistic college professors whose "not-so-secret" agenda it is to convert their students away from religion.

Truth be told, I don't think there is a person here who can fully understand the trials and temptations of another unless they have walked in their shoes – experiencing the same things they have experienced. This is yet another reason we should always be *quick to listen and slow to speak*, as the Bible says - not hastily judging a person but, in everything, lovingly pointing them to God's Word for correction, forgiveness and help.

We may not be able to completely understand or help a person with what they are going through, but God always can. Why? Because he is omniscient – knowing all things! He knows the perverseness that lies deep in the human heart: the corruption of our nature that always desires

sin. He sees every situation we face and also knows all the evils that are done to us through no fault of our own.

He is our Creator who sees and knows all - and this is one reason why he took it upon himself to save us. How? By taking on human flesh and blood in order to be tempted in every way just as we are and yet remain without sin. He did this so that he could give us his record of righteousness as a free gift through faith. He did this so that he could suffer and die for all our sins so that we might have eternal life.

Yes, our God can absolutely understand us because Jesus is like us in every way: a flesh and blood human, who experienced temptation, pain, suffering, loss, joy, sorrow and everything else we can imagine. He knows what it is like to be a child, a teen, and an adult. For 30 years he lived like everyone else did in his community –working hard for his earthly father by learning the trade of carpentry. He knew what it was to struggle for food and face want. Jesus was so much like us, that no one before his baptism actually knew him.

And this is why I find the first verse of our sermon text so comforting: *When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.*

Think about what this verse means: there our Savior stood – in a crowd of people – indistinguishable from anyone else. Even John the Baptist said: *“I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’”*<sup>i</sup> And when John, figuring Jesus was the Savior, tried to prevent Him from being baptized, He replied: *it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.*<sup>ii</sup>

“Since baptism is a sacrament of repentance for the forgiveness of sin,” we might ask, “what need would the sinless Savior have for it?” The answer is: even though He was sinless, God the Father laid all our sins upon him and, for this reason, Jesus needed to be baptized for their forgiveness.

Jesus baptism, therefore, reveals him as a human being – just like us – who knows what it feels like to carry the burden of our specific sins because that is exactly what he carried to the cross. Jesus is like us – so much so that he is not ashamed to call us his brothers.

And if he is like us, then we can go to him in prayer – confident that he knows our needs and understands us completely. Through the preaching of his Word He calls us to repent of our sins and trust in him for their forgiveness. He is the answer to every problem we face in life. We can trust in him to get us through every trial, temptation and sin because, as Christ’s baptism shows, he is not just a man, completely like us: he is also the Son of God, who is completely unlike us, and therefore has the power to help.

Part Two: Totally unlike us: *The divine Christ*

What public wonders occurred when Jesus was baptized! We read: *as [Jesus] was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove.*

As He so often did in his ministry, Jesus prayed. For what? We don't know exactly, but I can imagine that it was that the Father bring glory to his name through the ministry into which he was about to be anointed.

You see, the words "Christ" and "Messiah" both mean the same thing: the anointed one. Anointing was the Old Testament custom of pouring oil on someone to install him into a public office. This custom was a living symbol – foreshadowing the day that God the Father would publically pour out the Holy Spirit on the promised Savior, giving Him every gift necessary to accomplish our salvation.

And this is exactly what happened to Jesus, in fulfillment of the prophecy recorded in Isaiah: "*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. <sup>2</sup> The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*"<sup>iii</sup> And again: *Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him.*"<sup>iv</sup>

Jesus' baptism, therefore, reveals him as the Christ, the long awaited Savior from sin. Not only that, but, at his baptism, *a voice came from heaven, and said "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

In other words, Jesus isn't just a man: He is the divine Son of God in human flesh and blood who has the power to save us from the evils that threaten our bodies and souls. And God the Father loves him – not just because Jesus is His eternal Son, but because He willingly submitted to his Father's will to save us from our sins through his suffering, death and resurrection.

So you see, brothers and sisters in Christ, just as it is comforting to know Jesus is a man, who can sympathize with our every weakness, so it is even more comforting to know him as our divine Savior who, unlike us, is the holy, all powerful God – possessing both the power and love to reconcile us lost sinners with God the Father.

Yes, Jesus' baptism definitely reveals how he is unlike us. But it also shows something else: it shows us how, through faith in His work, we can become children of God – just like him. How so? Because all the events that happened at Jesus' baptism also happened at ours.

"But how can that be?" you might ask. "I have witnessed many baptisms and have never seen heaven open and the Spirit descending like a dove. I have never heard the Father's voice." Well, just because we have not seen these things happen with our physical eyes doesn't mean that they aren't a spiritual reality. They are, and with the help of God's Word I will show you how.

Let's start with heaven being opened. Because of sin, heaven is naturally closed to all people. But because Christ suffered and died for our sin, that great curtain no longer blocks our approach to God, as the Scriptures say: <sup>14</sup> *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. . .* <sup>16</sup> *Let us*

*then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.<sup>v</sup> And again: In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.<sup>vi</sup>*

As you can see, heaven is open to all who believe in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. But what about the Holy Spirit being given to us at our baptism?

Consider Peter's words spoken at Pentecost: "*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>vii</sup>*" Consider also what the apostle Paul said in our first lesson: *[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,<sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.<sup>viii</sup>*

And, finally, there is God the Father's declaration that we are his dearly loved children. Consider the Scriptures that say: *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,<sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.<sup>ix</sup>* And again: *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!<sup>x</sup>*

So you see, brothers and sisters in Christ: Jesus' baptism not only shows how Jesus is the Savior – both like and unlike us. It also shows us how we, who are unlike him, are declared to be like him: dearly loved children of God, perfect and holy because our sins have been washed onto Jesus and, by his work, forgiven. God's gift of the Holy Spirit proves all this to be true!

Is there some temptation, trial or tribulation wearing you down? Do you feel as if no one understands you, that there is no one who can help? Then turn to Jesus remembering who He was revealed to be at his baptism. Pray to him - repenting of your sins and remembering his love for you. Study His Word for solace, forgiveness, counsel and advice. Come to communion to remember the great sacrifice he underwent to redeem you for God. Remember also your baptism, and the great blessings of the Holy Spirit, an open heaven and being declared a child of God. By doing this, God will strengthen your faith and give you the hope you need. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> John 1:33 NIV84

<sup>ii</sup> Matthew 3:15 NIV84

<sup>iii</sup> Isaiah 11:1-2 NIV84

<sup>iv</sup> Isaiah 42:1 NIV84

<sup>v</sup> Hebrews 4:14, 16 NIV84

<sup>vi</sup> Ephesians 3:12 NIV84

<sup>vii</sup> Acts 2:38-39 NIV84

<sup>viii</sup> Titus 3:5-6, NIV84

<sup>ix</sup> Galatians 3:26-27 NIV84

<sup>x</sup> 1 John 3:1 NIV84