

Sermon for January 12, 2014 – Epiphany 1

Matthew 3:13-17 (NKJV)

Theme: **Yes, even Jesus was baptized!**

- 1) *His baptism revealed Him as the Christ.*
- 2) *His baptism reveals the gifts we received at ours*

"¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ And John tried to prevent Him, saying, " I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answered and said to him, " Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. ¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, " This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." x

"What's so special about baptism?" There are many people - even Christians - asking that very question. According to outward appearance, it seems nothing more than a church custom. You see the minister apply water he got from the tap less than an hour before the service, and simply saying: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." What does that even mean? Why do so many people consider it important?

The word "baptize" means "to wash, to purify". In baptism Jesus washes us clean from all sin. God anoints us with His Holy Spirit and puts His name on us. He declares us to be His dearly, loved children, all because of what His Son has done for us.

Sadly, many Christian denominations think that baptism is nothing more than an act of dedicating yourself to God. But this is far from the truth. Baptism is not something we do for God; it is something God does for us. It is not our act of dedicating ourselves to God. It's the exact opposite: baptism is the sacred act in which God dedicates himself to us.

Baptism is so incredibly important that Jesus himself was baptized. Let us see why, under the theme: **Yes, even Jesus was baptized!** 1) *His baptism revealed Him as the Christ.* 2) *His baptism reveals the gifts we received at ours*

Part One: His baptism revealed Him as the Christ.

Our text takes place about 30 years after Jesus' birth. During those years Jesus remained hidden from the public eye. What was he doing during that time? Most likely what any good Jewish son would do: help support his family. But as he lived his day to day life, He also did something else: He daily and perfectly kept for us the very Law we daily sin against. Jesus was *tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.* (Hebrews 4:15, NIV84) Even before Jesus entered his public ministry, He was hard at work - earning the righteousness we need to stand before God.

John the Baptist's ministry was in full swing - calling people to repentance and faith. When the crowds started to wonder if John were the Christ, he gave glory to God and talked about how he merely baptized with water. The Messiah would be far more powerful than him. He would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

It seems like, not too long after John said this, *Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him.*

To say that John was troubled by Jesus' request is an understatement. The NKJV's translation "*trying to prevent*" is a nice way of saying that John strongly refused to baptize Jesus. And why? Because John didn't understand Jesus' need for baptism. Didn't John just tell the Pharisees that the Messiah would be one whose sandals he would be unworthy to untie? Didn't John just tell the crowds that He simply baptizes with water, but that the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit? Wasn't John's baptism meant for sinners who need forgiveness? "No, Jesus. You've got it all wrong. I am the sinner and you are the Savior. *I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?*"

Jesus knew that he didn't "need" baptism, as we need baptism for the forgiveness of sins. His baptism had another purpose; one that John did not understand, but that would be revealed soon enough. *Jesus answered . . . , " Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.*

What is the righteousness that Jesus came to fulfill? Our righteousness. Jesus, in and of himself, did not "need" baptism. But He needed to be baptized for us. Think of Jesus' Baptism in light of what St. Paul once wrote to the Corinthians: *[God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* (2Co 5:21 NKJ) Even though Jesus was sinless, for our sake God considered him the greatest sinner that ever lived. He was bearing all our sins and it was for their forgiveness that He was baptized.

So just think, dear Christian, when you see Jesus being baptized, you are seeing your Savior being forgiven of all your sins. More than that, you are seeing God the Father put His stamp of approval on the work His Son had come to do, as we see next:

When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, " This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

In fulfillment of our Old Testament Lesson for today, God anointed his Son with the Holy Spirit – giving him every gift necessary to carry out his ministry. Now please don't think that this is the first time God gave Jesus the Spirit. No, Jesus always had the Holy Spirit with him ever since He was conceived. But now Jesus was entering a new phase of his work. He was entering public ministry and so the Holy Spirit was given to him in a visible way to give him every gift necessary to fulfill His office as our Savior. More than that, Jesus heard His Father's reassuring voice that He is His Son, in whom He is well pleased. Why was this important? Because 40 days later, the devil would try to get Jesus to doubt that He was the Messiah – the Son of God; tempting him to prove it by performing miracles and testing God. This reassurance from the Father would strengthen him for the tough and tempting days ahead – just as the gift of the Holy Spirit newly and publicly poured out upon him would assist him in His preaching and teaching ministry. This same Spirit assists us in our various vocations today.

At His baptism, Jesus was declared to be the Christ – God's anointed Savior. For our sake he was baptized, carrying our sins. For our sake He was given the Holy Spirit to give him every tool necessary to carry out his public ministry as our prophet, priest and King. For our sake He heard his Father's voice – reassuring and strengthening him for the tough days ahead. Yes, even Jesus was baptized! His baptism revealed Him as the Christ. Let us now see how his baptism reveals the gifts we received at ours

Part Two: His baptism reveals the gifts we received at ours

As I mentioned before, there are an increasing number of people in this world who say that baptism is not important. They keep their children from being baptized so that they can decide for themselves whether or not they want to be baptized. They are, in effect, proclaiming that baptism is no big deal – it's just some take it or leave it church custom.

In response to this kind of thinking, Luther once said: “The Son of God had himself baptized, how can you then be so arrogant, yes, so blind and foolish, that you despise holy baptism? Even if baptism was of no other use or benefit to you, should you not give it all honor simply because you hear that the Son of God had himself baptized?”

In a certain way Jesus' baptism gives our baptism its power. Why do I say that? Because Jesus, at his baptism, was anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our Savior. And it is because Jesus is in fact our Savior, that God forgives our sins at our baptism while offering us new life and salvation through it.

Consider this as well: What happened at Jesus' baptism also happened at our own baptism. When we were baptized, our sins were washed away and God the Father made the declaration: “You are my son. You are my daughter. I am well pleased with you. Why? Because, through Baptism, I have clothed you with my Son and His righteousness.” How do I know that God the Father made this declaration at your Baptism? Because the Scriptures say: “*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* (Gal 3:26-27 NKJ)

Just as Jesus received the Holy Spirit at His baptism to give him every gift necessary to carry out his office as the Savior, so also the Holy Spirit has been given to us at our baptism to strengthen and give us every gift we need to carry out our lives as Christians – living to the glory of God. How do I know this is true? Because the Scriptures say: “*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children* (Act 2:38-39 NKJ)

And just as heaven was opened at Jesus' baptism, so also we can be sure that heaven has been opened to us through our own baptism – all because of Jesus' perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection on our behalf.

Since we have received all these gifts in baptism: the forgiveness of sin, the gift of faith, rebirth as children of God, the seal of the Holy Spirit and having heaven open to us. . . is there any wonder why we Lutherans treasure baptism so dearly? Is it any wonder why we so emphatically desire our children to be baptized as soon as possible? Is it any wonder why Luther encouraged Christians everywhere to daily remember their baptisms and thereby drown our old Adam with all its sinful desires, that our new man might arise within us to live our life as the child of God that the LORD declared us to be at our baptisms?

Yes, dear Christians, even Jesus was baptized. His baptism declared him to be the Christ – the Son of God and our Savior from Sin. His baptism reveals all the gifts we received at ours. May the LORD lead us to ever treasure our baptisms, and if we are ever tempted to doubt its significance, look to Jesus' baptism to be reminded of what things God has done for us at our baptisms – how He dedicated himself to be our Savior, God and ever loving Father. Amen.