

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday After Epiphany, January 22, 2023

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 244, 63:5, 134, 328, 54.
Lessons: Isaiah 61:1-3, Acts 10: 34-38, Luke 4:13-21.
Sermon Text: Matthew 3:13-17
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

John the Baptist had two messages: First: Repent of your sins, and Second: The Savior is coming, and he is coming soon! John had refused to baptize Pharisees who showed no fruits of repentance. He was reluctant to baptize Jesus because Jesus had no sins to confess, nothing of which to repent.

The Apostle John writes in his Gospel that *“John [the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.’ Then John gave this testimony: ‘I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 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.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”* John 1:29-34 (NIV)

Today we look carefully at

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

1. Why was Jesus baptized by John?
2. What does this mean for us?

Jesus is now about 30 years of age. He didn't need a baptism of repentance. John recognized his own sinfulness, and he knew the Messiah would be sinless. The baptism of Jesus was not commanded, as Christ himself commands us to baptize when he says: *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”* Matthew 28:19 (KJV)

But Jesus' baptism identified him with the world of sinners.

When Jesus came to John to be baptized, we read *“But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’”* John's words recognize Jesus' mission

But at his birth and in his baptism Jesus had united himself with a mankind that was under the wrath and judgment of God. He was baptized in order *“to fulfill all righteousness”*, in order that in him the will of God might be completely and really accomplished. He came to John in humility.

In the sacrament of baptism which Jesus himself commanded, we learn from Luther's words that “Baptism works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.”

Jesus earned that forgiveness of sins.

While Jesus himself never sinned, he took upon himself the burden of all the sins of all the world. In his life and death on earth, he suffered for all the sins of all mankind. The letter to the Hebrew Christians tells us: *“In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should*

make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.” Hebrews 2:10 (NIV) This is our great high priest, who sacrificed himself ***“once for all when he offered himself.”*** Hebrews 7:26-27 (NIV)

In his humility, in his humbling himself from his glorious throne in heaven, Jesus fulfilled the perfection demanded of God; he fulfilled all righteousness. It is that redeeming righteousness of God which is the content of the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation. It is that Gospel of the righteousness of Christ that the Apostle Paul boasts about in Romans 1: ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”*** Romans 1:16 (KJV)

John tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized by him. But this would really hinder Jesus from carrying out his entire mission on earth.

Certainly John might have wondered why the Christ was coming to him and seeking Baptism. Luther had this to say about John asking “Why does [the Messiah] come and seek Baptism, as there is no sin and uncleanness in Him which Baptism would remove?” Luther then answers: “That will be a blessed baptism. John here is getting a sinner who in His own person has no sin, and yet is the greatest sinner, [who] has and bears the sin of the whole world. For this reason He permits Himself to be baptized and confesses with this action that He is a sinner. However, not for Himself, but for us. For He here takes my place and [your] place and stands in our stead who are sinners, and since all, especially the arrogant ... do not want to be [considered and thought of as] sinners, He must become a sinner for all; He assumes the form of our sinful flesh and [suffers], on the cross and in His passion, ... the weight of the sins which He bears.”

So Jesus overrules John’s objection and is baptized. It was the proper, the right, and the expedient thing to do. And so John baptized Jesus.

It was not a legal requirement that Jesus be baptized. Jesus was simply saying that this was what the Father wanted them to do, and that was enough explanation for John. Scripture is clear when we read ***“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)

We do not know exactly how this baptism was performed. We cannot say for sure that John immersed Jesus. When we read ***“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water”*** that simply tells us that Jesus stepped up on the bank of the Jordan River.

We also see this as encouragement for us that we should encourage the use of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, which Jesus instituted for us.

2.

The opening of the heavens is more than just the clouds opening and the sun shining. It is a special revelation of the Triune God. ***“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and [John] saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”***

John saw the Holy Spirit come down on Jesus in the form of a dove because the Holy Ghost assumed the visible form of a dove. This was not just a vision or an apparition. We read: ***“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.’”*** Luke 3:22 (NIV)

The Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost took the form of a dove. In Scripture the dove is used as a symbol of innocence and peace. The dove Noah sent from the ark returned carrying an olive branch, which people throughout the world recognize as a symbol of peace.

The Apostle Peter wrote this: ***“God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”*** 1 Peter 3:20-21 (NIV) Peter compares the ark, which God had commanded, to the baptism which was also commanded by Jesus. Peace was being extended to man as evidenced by the dove Noah sent out and also evidenced by the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

Peace was being extended to man through the means of delivering God’s grace to mankind. We recognize the Gospel in the Word and the Gospel in the sacraments as God extending his peace to sinful mankind.

The Holy Ghost was very prominent in Jesus' life on earth. This is most obvious in several ways. Jesus had been conceived by Holy Spirit. Now, at the time of his baptism, the Holy Spirit bestowed on Jesus the special gifts he would need to carry out the responsibilities of his office, the official duties of his office as the Messiah.

We read about the work of Jesus even in his home town of Nazareth immediately after his three great, dramatic temptations of Satan in the wilderness. At Nazareth, Jesus read from Isaiah 61, our Old Testament lesson, and ***“he began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’”*** Luke 4:21 (NIV) He told the people in his home-town synagogue ***“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*** Luke 4:13-19 (NIV) Right now, he tells them, is the time the Lord’s favor. The Lord’s grace is come upon you, just as I am proclaiming to you.

Jesus is the one of whom Isaiah also wrote saying the Spirit of the LORD will rest upon him: ***“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. 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 – and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy.”*** Isaiah 11:1-4 (NIV)

At Jesus' baptism, the Father spoke from heaven, acknowledging Jesus as his beloved Son. About three years later, near the end of Jesus' ministry, the Father spoke similar words from heaven on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured. At that time, these words from the Father especially strengthened Jesus for the suffering he was about to endure. ***“A bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!’”*** Matthew 17:5 (NIV) Peter, James and the Apostle John were there to see that.

Jesus' baptism was just the beginning of his public ministry. The Apostle Mark tells us ***“At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.”*** Mark 1:9-13 (NIV) Of course, those temptations were not the only times Satan tempted Jesus. Jesus was tempted to sin every day of his life on earth.

So at Jesus' baptism, we see the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit revealed. But this is not the first time in Scripture, nor is it the last. The very first revelation of the Triune God? Look to Genesis chapter 1 starting with verse 1: ***“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”*** Genesis 1:1-3 (NIV) But where is Jesus? Remember John chapter 1 verse 1 tells us ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*** John 1:1 (NIV) And verse 14 assures us: ***“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*** John 1:14 (NIV)

May we recognize in the baptism of Jesus the beginning of his public ministry, serving mankind to give them the Gospel of eternal life. Amen.