

The Baptism of Our Lord

January 7, 2018

Mark 1:9-11 (EHV) - ⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰Just as Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with you."

Introduction

Every so often, you and I are privileged to witness a special kind of miracle in worship. The strengthening of faith that happens every Sunday is a miracle; the real presence of Jesus' true body and blood in the Lord's Supper is a miracle; but what a privilege it is when we have the chance to witness someone being born again – being born into the family of God – being born into the newness of faith! In reality, what we behold is a very unreasonable thing. The problem that confronts the unbaptized is sin and spiritual death. And sin is by no means localized to the spot on the forehead where we apply the water in a baptism. It's definitely a problem that goes deeper than the surface of the skin. By nature, it permeates our whole being – we're sinful through and through. But in no time at all, that completely changes. Those who have been baptized are spiritually alive and all their sins have been washed away. I say that we observe something unreasonable because as far as outward appearances are concerned, all we do is pour some ordinary tap water on a person's head. But you know that it isn't just plain water at work, but water connected with God's powerful Word.

Theme – View Your Baptism in Light of Christ's Baptism.

But there's something else that's involved. There's something else that we have to take into account for baptism to be able to do the amazing things that it promises. Our Gospel lesson this morning gives us the basis for the sacrament of Christian baptism, and that basis is nothing less than the vicarious atonement of God's Son. This morning God speaks to you through his servant Mark, reminding you to **VIEW YOUR BAPTISM IN LIGHT OF CHRIST'S BAPTISM**. He reminds you that, **through baptism, God's beloved Son made you God's beloved child**. He also reminds you that, **through baptism, Jesus' outstanding approval rating becomes your own**.

Part 1 – Through baptism, God's beloved Son made you God's beloved child.

Have you ever listened to brand new parents carry on about how adorable their little baby is, and then when you're alone with your spouse say: "You know – that baby isn't all that cute?" Yeah – me neither! Be honest, though. We might say things like that in private that we'd never want repeated in public. If someone showed you a picture of their child, you'd never say, "Boy, you sure have one ugly kid!"

Can you believe that God would ever dare say such a thing? He did, you know. When Adam and Eve delivered their child, God's record says, "Boy, the two of you sure have one ugly kid." Actually, the exact words he used, which basically mean the same thing, are, "**Adam... had a son in his own likeness, in his own image.**" And since we know that "**the LORD does not look at the things man looks at... the LORD looks at the heart,**" he's saying that the ugliness of Adam and Eve's children was *under* the skin. They weren't pure and holy and innocent and adorable as Adam and Eve had once been. They were ugly. They were corrupt. They were rotten to the very core. And you could see the family resemblance because the same was now true of their parents.

In a certain sense, all of humanity can be considered God's offspring. Paul told the Athenians, "**He himself gives all men life and breath.**" But in another sense, and equally true, God says of every newborn boy or girl, "That's not my child." Again, to be more exact:

“You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked when you followed the ways of this present world. You were following the ruler of the domain of the air, the spirit now at work in the people who disobey. Formerly, we all lived among them in the passions of our sinful flesh, as we carried out the desires of the sinful flesh and its thoughts. Like all the others, we were by nature objects of God’s wrath.”

That’s why John the Baptist had to come, **“baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”** Now just hold onto that thought.

Jesus is also God’s child, but in a much more special and intimate way. He’s the **“only-begotten”** Son of God. He is, as we confess in the Nicene Creed, **“eternally begotten”** and **“not made.”** He himself is true God from all eternity. As God, it’s essentially impossible that Jesus could have sin attached to him in any way. All of Scripture clearly supports that truth. How is it, then, that immediately after we hear about John administering a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, we read of Jesus’ own baptism by John? It just doesn’t make any sense. Matthew even makes a point of this in his Gospel by telling us that John tried to prevent him from being baptized.

The truth of it is this: Jesus so associated himself with the lost people of this world that he underwent the sinners’ baptism even though he himself was sinless. God the Father gave vocal testimony that the Son of Man and Son of God stepping up onto the bank of the river was his dearly beloved child.

Now back to that thought you were holding. The only people who will ever enter God’s heaven are those who are counted as his children. The problem, as we pointed out, is that all people are born outside of his family. Here’s where you need to view your baptism in light of Christ’s baptism. Through baptism, God’s beloved Son made you God’s beloved child. Because Christ numbered himself with us sinners and presented himself in our place, baptism has tremendous meaning. Through a rebirth consisting of water and the Spirit, a transformation took place and a spiritually dead heart was miraculously brought to life. Not brought *back* to life, but beating for the very first time. And because Christ’s baptism signified the beginning of his passive obedience – that he suffered and died for the sins of yours that he took upon himself – God can call each of you his own beloved child who stands to inherit heaven.

Transition

Any amount of water and any amount of God’s Word would be meaningless were it not for the baptism Jesus endured. You have the reminder that you’re God’s beloved children. You’re also reminded that, through baptism, Jesus’ outstanding approval rating becomes your own.

Part 2 – Through baptism, Jesus’ outstanding approval rating becomes your own.

When you hear the words “approval rating,” you probably think of the overall opinion of how the President is doing. In the entertainment industry, “ratings” are based on how many people are watching various television programs. Spiritually speaking, there are two glaring passages that describe the approval rating of each and every individual. **“There is no one who is righteous, not even one.”** And, **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** Twist and turn all you want, you can’t wiggle out of the accusation and condemnation of those two passages. They’re all-inclusive. Hold that thought.

At the time of Jesus’ baptism, he was thirty years old, the typical age when a person was considered eligible for serving as a religious teacher. How many sins do you guess that you’ve committed up until the time you were thirty? A mind-boggling figure? Jesus could’ve been born with no hands and still would’ve been able to count the number of his sins on his fingers. In other words, zero! Not a one! Up until that point, he was sinless, and

therefore met God's standard of approval. Again, the Father gave vocal testimony to that truth: **"You are my Son. I am well pleased with you."** And remember that God is only pleased with perfection.

Through baptism, an amazing thing happens. Not only do water and Word wash away sin, they also effect the application of Christ's absolute righteousness onto the person being baptized. Considering your baptism in light of Christ's baptism means that his outstanding approval rating has become your own. In familiar words, Paul says, **"God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him."** Through his Son, God can look at each of you and say, **"I am well pleased with you."**

Conclusion

Besides actually witnessing a baptismal miracle once again this morning, our time of reflection on Christian baptism in this order of service has great meaning for us today and every day. Remember to think upon the meaning of baptism often. God, through Christ and through your baptism, made you his beloved child. And God, through Christ and through your baptism, approves of you as his own. May your baptism always be the blessed comfort that God intends it to be! Amen.