

Sermon for January 12, 2020 – Epiphany 1

Matthew 3:13-17 (EHV)

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

- 1) His baptism revealed Him as the Christ.
- 2) His baptism gives our Baptism its power.

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John at the Jordan. ¹⁴But John tried to stop him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?” ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, because it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John let him. ¹⁶After Jesus was baptized, he immediately went up out of the water. Suddenly, the heavens were opened for him! He saw the Spirit of God, descending like a dove and landing on him, ¹⁷and a voice out of the heavens said, “This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him.”

“With all due respect, this is not how it’s supposed to work. You must have misspoken.” Who do you imagine saying this to Jesus? A progressive minded Christian, trying to reinterpret the Bible to fit society’s “woke” culture? How about a pastor – struggling with a sermon text? How about you, as you struggle with something in God’s Word that you don’t understand? Sadly, I must confess that my thoughts and actions have often betrayed me questioning our Saviour’s wisdom. Lord, have mercy on me – a sinner.

Who is it that we see disagreeing with Jesus today? Why, it’s none other than John the Baptist – the great forerunner of the Messiah! Even he is shocked at the humility Jesus undergoes as our Saviour. Isn’t baptism meant for repentant sinners who recognize their absolute need for spiritual cleansing? Wasn’t it a means of forgiveness as they prepared for the Messiah in faith? How then could the sinless Messiah himself request such a cleansing? With all due respect, Jesus, that’s not how it’s supposed to work.

Ah, but it was. This was God’s ordained way to reveal Jesus as the Christ. Because of Jesus’ Baptism, our baptisms are more than a mere church rite. They are a means through which Jesus conveys the very same blessings upon us that he both won and received at his baptism. Let us consider these wonderful truths this morning, under the theme: **Yes, Jesus was also baptized!** 1) His baptism revealed Him as the Christ. 2) His baptism gives our Baptism its power.

Part Two: His Baptism revealed Him as the Christ.

Our text takes place about 30 years after Jesus’ birth. During those “silent 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 “regular looking” life – He also did something else: He was perfectly keeping God’s Law in our place. Yes, even before Jesus entered his public ministry, He was hard at work - earning the righteousness we need to stand before God. He was *tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.*¹

Our sermon text finds John the Baptist's ministry of calling people to repentance and faith in full swing. When the crowds started to wonder whether or not John himself was the Messiah, he humbly confessed the truth: that the coming Christ is so holy, that he would be unworthy of serving the Messiah in the most menial of ways like untying his sandals. John only baptized with water for repentance. The Christ would baptize people with the Holy Spirit and fire.ⁱⁱ

It probably wasn't too long after John the Baptist confessed these things that *Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John at the Jordan.* ¹⁴*But John tried to stop him...*

To say that John was troubled by Jesus' request for baptism is an understatement. The Greek grammar behind the phrase "*tried to stop*" indicates an ongoing balking on John's part regarding Jesus' request. One can almost imagine him trying to convince Jesus that his request wasn't right. Why? Because John didn't understand Jesus' need for baptism. Didn't John tell the crowds that the Messiah would be great in holiness, righteousness and power? Wasn't John's baptism meant for repentant sinners who need forgiveness? And who was he to baptize the Holy One? So we can just imagine John saying: "With all due respect, Jesus, this is not how it's supposed to work. You must have misspoken. I am the sinner and you are the Saviour. *I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?*"

Jesus knew that he didn't "need" baptism the same way we do: for the forgiveness of His sins. His baptism would serve another great purpose; one that John did not understand at the moment, but that would be revealed soon enough. So, *Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, because it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness."* Then John let him.

This invites the question: what, exactly, is the righteousness Jesus came to fulfill? That's simple: Our righteousness. Jesus did not "need" baptism for the forgiveness of his own sins, but He did need to win the forgiveness of ours. Think of the situation in the light of what St. Paul once wrote to the Corinthians concerning Jesus: ²¹*God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.*ⁱⁱⁱ Even though Jesus was sinless, for our sake God considered him the greatest sinner that ever lived. Bearing all our sins he appeared before John – making the perfect repentance for them that we, due to our utter sinfulness, are incapable of making. For our sake, he was baptized, in order to fulfill all righteousness for us.

So just think, dear Christian: when you see Jesus being baptized, you see your perfect Saviour, perfectly repenting and being forgiven of all your sins in your place. 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 read next:

¹⁶*After Jesus was baptized, he immediately went up out of the water. Suddenly, the heavens were opened for him! He saw the Spirit of God, descending like a dove and landing on him, ¹⁷and a voice out of the heavens said, "This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him."*

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, the Holy Spirit was with Jesus ever since He was conceived. But now Jesus was entering a new phase of his life: being publicly revealed as the

Messiah. For this reason, the Holy Spirit was given to him in a visible way – publicly indicating that He is the LORD’s anointed Saviour who has been given every gift necessary to carry out His mission and ministry as the Christ.

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 for the next 40 days after His baptism, the devil would try to get Jesus to doubt that He is the Son of God. The devil would tempt him to prove himself by testing God. This reassurance from the Father would strengthen him for the tough and tempting days in the desert wilderness – 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 Saviour. For our sake, he was baptized – to fulfill all righteousness for us. For our sake, He was given the Holy Spirit and every gift necessary to carry out his public ministry as our Saviour. 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 our Baptism.

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

There are many people in this world who don’t understand the great purpose and power of Baptism. Thinking it’s just another ancient “take-it-or-leave-it” Church ritual meant to dedicate oneself to God, many despise baptism – keeping both their children and themselves away from this blessed sacrament. 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?”

Yes, Jesus himself was baptized – that is certainly reason enough to honor this sacrament. But there is more: Our baptisms are amazingly powerful means through which God graciously bestows on us the most precious of gifts. How so? Because Baptism connects us to Christ – making the very gifts Jesus received at His Baptism our very own.

Consider this as well: the spiritual events that happened at Jesus’ baptism also happened at yours. When you were baptized, your 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 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 Bible tells believers: ²⁶*In fact, you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.* ²⁷*Indeed, as many of you as were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.*^{iv}

Just as Jesus received the Holy Spirit at His baptism to give him every gift necessary to carry out his office as the Saviour, so also the Holy Spirit has been given to us at our baptisms to strengthen and give us every gift we need to carry out our lives as dearly loved children of God. How do I

know this is true? Because God's Words says: *"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. ³⁹For the promise is for you and for your children^v*

And just as heaven was opened to Jesus at his baptism, so we can be sure that heaven has been opened to us too – all because of Jesus' perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection on our behalf. Through baptism, we've been given new birth. We have been adopted by God into His family. Regarding this, the Scriptures say: *See the kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are!*^{vi}

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 there any wonder why we so emphatically desire our children to be baptized as soon as possible? Is there 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 lives as the children 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 Saviour from sin. His baptism also 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 Saviour, God and ever-loving Father. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. Hebrews 4:15

ⁱⁱ Cf. Luke 2:15-17, Matthew 2:11 and John 1:24-27

ⁱⁱⁱ 2 Corinthians 5:21 EHV

^{iv} Galatians 3:26-27 EHV

^v Act 2:38-39 EHV

^{vi} 1 John 3:1 EHV