

Jesus' Baptism... Your Baptism
Luke 3:15-22
The Baptism of Our Lord
January 13, 2019

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Sometimes, we make the mistake of comparing Jesus' baptism to our baptism as if comparing apples to apples. But St Luke's Gospel teaches us rightly and informs us that we should *not* see Christ's baptism as our own, but should rejoice that Christ's baptism is the foundation of joy for our own.

Indeed, Luke makes very clear that Jesus' baptism is all about his identity – not his identity by *adoption* (like our baptisms), but his identity by *substance* – “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” the Father says of Jesus. It reminds us of that passage from the Psalms as highlighted again by the epistle to the Hebrews: “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.” With these words, the Father makes known that this Jesus is the fulfillment of all prophetic hopes, and his baptism has now anointed him for his task as the Christ who will be the sacrifice laid upon the altar of Calvary. So, with Jesus' baptism, all of heaven is opened to us – don't the gospels even

record that the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove upon Jesus. That happened not for Christ's benefit – the heavens were already opened to him – He is God and shares all heavenly glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Rather, it happened for ours, that – for the first time in Scripture and the first time in history – the world may look upon the Holy Trinity and have the mysteries of the heavenly promises plainly shown us: this Jesus is the ladder to heaven, he gives us access to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is given to point us to this Jesus.

And this is why Jesus' baptism does not happen in a vacuum of space and time, but rather happens in the context of John preparing and baptizing the penitent. For, the very way we benefit from and make use of the baptism of Jesus – the very way His baptism opens heaven to us – is by our baptism attaching us to Him. John is all about attaching his hearers to Jesus: "I am not the Christ," John says, "He who is mightier than I is coming." John is all about pointing you to Jesus.

But, if we are going to learn of the importance of our baptism, we must hear John's words about this Jesus' work, and – in fact – we ought notice the pattern of *John's* work as well.

John says that, to be baptized into Christ, is to be defended *from* Christ. Did you notice that in our text? Christ is coming to "baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his

barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” In other words, John says, not one person will be left without a baptism of sorts – either the baptism of the Holy Spirit, in which Jesus shields you and protects you from the fires of hell with the watery shield of the Lord and Giver of Life who proceeds from the Father and the Son, OR – if one has no use for this baptism of water and the Spirit, then Jesus will baptize with fire when he comes again in his glory. On that day, he will clear his threshing floor and gather in the wheat of his Church, but the chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire.

Those are John’s words about the work of Jesus. The *mercy* of Jesus in your own baptism defends you from the *judgment* of Jesus when he comes again in glory. Consider the Proper Preface the pastor sings during Advent, and how it confesses of this Jesus:

“Whose way John the Baptist prepared, proclaiming Him the promised Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and calling sinners to repentance, that they might escape from the wrath to be revealed when he (that same Messiah) comes again in His glory.”

In short, where *Jesus’* baptism reveals his glory as the only Son from heaven, *your* baptism conceals and safeguards you from his glory on the day of judgment – and, free from that wrath –you are afforded to share in his glory in the life everlasting. As that same Lord Jesus says of His own coming in glory,

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and the angels with him... he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left (or, we might say ‘wheat’ on his right, ‘chaff’ on his left). Then

[He] will say to those on his right, "Come, you, who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you."

...Inherit that kingdom prepared as written into the will and inheritance of the covenant of your baptismal adoption. For, you have been baptized into Christ's cross; therefore, *saved* by his death, you will receive his life. *Buried* with him in death, you will share in his resurrection, St Paul says. *Baptized* into Christ's cross, you will wear Christ's crown.

That is the gift little Charlotte is mysteriously and divinely given today. That is the kingdom prepared for her as written into the inheritance of baptismal adoption. And that gift little Charlotte is given is no child's play, for it is the same mysterious and divine gift that each and every Christian wears and lives in and depends upon all our days – that baptismal garment Christ has given you and adoption as sons of God, that you might share all the benefits of Him to whom the Father says, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. You are my Son; with you I am well pleased." Those words were meant for the Only Begotten... but, by adoption, the benefits of those words are also shared with you by your divine Brother.

And that means, this baptism of yours is something to cling to all your days and it safely carries you even to this life's close. This past week, little Charlotte's great-grandmother died in Christ – and what could she cling to, what could her grieving loved ones cling to – but the same joy and comfort her little great-granddaughter has

today – whether 80 years old or 8 days old, the promise and the comfort is the same: “Baptism now saves you,” Peter declares. And, what is that baptism? The apostle explains: “Not the washing of dirt from the body, but a washing that gives a clear conscience before God.”

Notice that – your baptism (Christ’s is different – he didn’t need a clear conscience) your baptism is all about forgiveness and life and salvation, standing before God with a clear conscience that says, “By my own merit I would be chaff, but by Christ’s merit, I am wheat. God’s own child I gladly say it, I am baptized into Christ.”

But, how much we wrestle with the Old Adam who seeks to dirty the body and the mind, and how much we are attacked by Satan, the accuser of the conscience. And, such spiritual warfare throughout life ought not be minimized, as if unnecessary or worthless, for our text for our readings for today call us to a baptismal life of a clear conscience – not a clear conscience before *myself*, as if I get to explain away my own sin – but a clear conscience before *God*, who knows and searches the heart. The words of Romans 6, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?... We were buried with [Christ] by baptism into his death, in order that... we may walk in newness of life.”

You see, the new birth of baptism is not a birth back into the godless freedoms of the old life of sin, but the birth into the new life

of the new creation... free to be people of God, that “we might walk in newness of life”, Paul says.

But, that means that when Old Adam rears his ugly head and sullies the body and the mind and the eyes, ears, and heart with sinful thoughts and sinful passions, and when Satan notices this and accuses us of it, we ought not deny such things, but rather, hear anew the exhortation of John, who pointed people to Christ’s grace, that they might escape Christ’s wrath.

In other words, the baptismal life is one *not* of pride in Christian freedom, but of repentance in Christian faith. Notice how the gospel reading highlights two aspects of John’s baptismally-pointing preaching: *exhortation* and *reproof*. He exhorts his hearers to examine themselves and repent, and he reproves any – even one as mighty as Herod – for not doing so. This exhortation and reproof is a hallmark of the baptismal life, isn’t it? Did Jesus really say, “Oh, you’re baptized? – go frolic and play in your sins, and we’ll occasionally talk about my dying on the cross and all will be well.” Or, did Jesus say at the end of Matthew’s gospel, “Make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them all things whatsoever” and again, in Mark’s gospel, “Go and proclaim the gospel to the whole world. Whoever believes [it] and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe (aka, does not “repent”) will be condemned.”

Yes, John’s preaching is a preaching of repentance. And that preaching of repentance accompanies baptism and even undergirds

and carries the baptismal life. Consider this odd sounding line from our reading, “So with many other exhortations he preached the good news to the people.” Really? Good news based on exhortations to repent? Absolutely!

If we don’t take our sins seriously, we don’t take forgiveness of sins seriously. If we don’t take the holiness of God seriously, we don’t take the mercy of God seriously. If we don’t take the wrath of God seriously, we don’t take the sacrifice of Christ seriously.

But, when we are exhorted and reprovved and driven to repentance, the Gospel of Christ – the news that Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross in the sinners’ stead, in *your* place, that you may not be condemned, but saved... not chaff, but wheat – that news is *good*.

This is why Martin Luther said that one of the great visible marks of the Church is the Office of the Keys. To paraphrase him, if people are not called to repentance, if there is no threat that the sins can be bound before God and that the sinner can be excommunicated not only from the Church on earth but the Church in heaven, then there is no joy in the loosing of sins. But the very fact that the church regularly calls to repentance and regularly declares forgiveness to the penitent and binds the sins of the impenitent is a mark that there the Gospel is at work freeing sinners from a burdened conscience by renewing them in the declaration of their baptismal inheritance.

Such is no psychological manipulation of Luther's toward his hearers, but such is the word of Christ, "I give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven; whatever is bound on earth is bound on heaven; whatever is loosed on earth is loosed in heaven." Don't hear in those words that some tyrannical clergy hijacks the keys to paradise. Rather, hear in those words the preaching of John – a preaching of exhortation and reproof – a preaching that awakens you to take sin seriously... but then a preaching that comforts with good news that Christ is on the scene, the Lamb of God is here to take away the sin of the world and open to you heaven, that you may learn of the mysteries of your Triune God and may rejoice in the plans He has for you through His only begotten Son, with whom He is well pleased.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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