



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092
(262)241-3121 www.stjohnsmequon.org
Email: office@stjohnsmequon.org
Pastor James Tiefel
(262) 853-9723 (cell#)
Email: pastortiefel@gmail.com

The First Sunday after the Epiphany

January 14, 2024

The Baptism of Our Lord

The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River marked the beginning of Jesus' ministry. In the three years that followed, Jesus completed what he had come to earth to do: To redeem the human race from the ownership of Satan and restore them as the forgiven children of God. This work of Jesus, approved by God the Father and empowered by God the Spirit, makes our baptism valid and valuable. This day, therefore, is a celebration of Jesus' baptism and ours.

Sermon Romans 6:1-11

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Introduction – Lutherans don't remember their baptisms. Well, that's not quite true. Some Lutherans were baptized as older children or adults and they probably remember. So let's say most Lutherans don't remember their baptisms because most Lutheran are baptized when they're babies. We don't remember stuff that happened when we were babies. There are some reminders: You probably have a baptismal certificate in the same place you save your birth certificate. There might be a few pictures of you with your sponsors. Our boys have their little baptism suits hidden away in a drawer someplace. But most of us haven't seen a certificate or a picture or our baptism clothes in ages. For most of us our baptism was a one and done deal that happened a long time ago.

The baptism of Jesus was kind of like that: All four Gospel writers tell us what happened when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River but they never mention his baptism again. We spend whole seasons talking about Jesus' birth and his passion and his resurrection; we hardly ever hear a sermon that doesn't mention Good Friday and Easter. Jesus' baptism? Once a year on the First Sunday after the Epiphany in the beginning of January. For most of us the baptism of Jesus was a one and done deal that happened a long time ago.

In the Second Reading for today, from Romans chapter 6, St. Paul helps us see that baptism isn't a one and done deal at all, not Jesus' baptism and not ours either. It's more than a certificate and a picture and cute little outfit. It's more than John the Baptist and the Jordan River and even more than the Father's voice and the Spirit's flight. When we came to the baptismal font, when water flowed over our heads with the Word of God as its partner, we began a journey with Jesus that we're still traveling. What began at the font leads us back to the font day after day. The truth is:

We Live Our Lives from the Font to the Font

So what happened at the Jordan? Things had been pretty quiet in Jesus' life until age 30, but even at age 12 Jesus knew what his assignment was. God from God and Light from Light took on a human form to undo what the serpent had done in Eden. The task he faced was terribly tough. He would stand in the place of every sinner who ever walked on earth. He would obey the law they had failed to obey and he would endure the punishment they had coming. What happened at the Jordan was the official beginning, the inauguration. He accepted the baptism that a sinner needs. He saw the heavens tear apart as the Spirit descended on him. He heard the voice of God thundering his approval. With that Jesus was off to the cross. The bigger question is: So what happened at the cross? At the cross Jesus carried all the sins of every sinner—including the sins of every sinner here this morning. When he cried out, **It is finished**, the great temple veil that separated imperfect people from a perfect God tore apart just as the heavens had torn apart at his baptism. When he came back to life on Easter morning, God was confirming what he had declared at Jesus baptism: **This is the Son I love; with him I am well pleased.** Here in Romans 6, Paul summarizes what happened: **For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.** So we know what happened at the Jordan and at the cross and at the tomb.

So what happened at the font? I mean the baptismal font? Make it personal: What happened at the font where you were baptized? Was the font a river like the Jordan? Royal babies are still baptized with water from the Jordan. Was the font made of granite or wood? Was the font a small bowl from your mom's cabinet or a thimble inside an incubator? Makes no difference. When you were baptized with water and with the promises of the Word, well, this is what St. Paul wrote: **Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death.** What does this all mean? This is what it means: Every baby born on this planet inherits the characteristics of Adam. Some babies are cute and some babies are not, some babies are healthy and some babies are not, but every baby looks like Adam and every baby sins like Adam. The Bible calls this nature the Old Adam or the old self. The old self controls and condemns us. It dooms us to death. When we were baptized, the water and the Word tied us to Jesus' death. Paul wrote, **For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.** The old self's control was buried, killed, drowned; so was its condemnation and its doom and its death. And there is more: **Just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. If we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.** When we were baptized, we weren't doing anything. Maybe standing if we were older, more likely lying in the arms of a parent or a sponsor, maybe sleeping, maybe wailing, maybe a little jerk when the warm water touched our heads. But the moment the pastor—or whoever it was—the moment he named us and spoke the words **I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**, at the moment water touched us, at that moment the old self died and the new self came to life. The old self in us was crucified with Christ and the new self was resurrected in Christ. That's what happened at the font.

So what happens in our life now? Every good thing you can think of: Forgiveness, peace, confidence, hope, a solution to every problem imaginable. You name it, we have it all in Jesus. The trouble is that sin always remains kind of interesting and intriguing. I suppose that's not surprising. I mean even after this past week, some people still like snow. So the old self shimmies out of his coffin and rises out of his swamp and catches our attention. What's a little sin going to hurt? Just a little bad language, just a little cheating, just a little jealousy, just a little

lusting. We don't deny the faith; we don't stop coming to church. We put on a good face; nobody knows what we're thinking. We're saved by grace after all. That's what the church members in Rome were thinking. Paul posed the problem: **What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?** And then he let out a scream: **By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?** He grabbed them and took them back to where they began: he took them to the font. He took them to the death Jesus died and the life Jesus gained. He took them to the death **they** died and the life they gained. He took them to the water and the Word of their baptism and he wrote: **Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

So what happens at the font? Martin Luther wrote in the Large Catechism: "The Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after." We return to the place where the sinful nature died and where the new life began. When we regret our sins, when we grieve over them, when we turn away from them, we are killing that old self just as it was killed and buried in baptism. When we trust in Jesus and follow Jesus and live for Jesus that new life takes over just as it did when we were baptized. We learned this in catechism class and we speak it whenever there is a baptism in church: "Baptism means that the Old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." Once upon a time long ago the font released us from the power of sin and now every day the font restores us and renews us to live for God. And so we live our lives from the font to the font.

Here it stands, the font I mean. We see it when we walk into church; we pass it when we receive Holy Communion. We hear its words and see its symbol at the beginning of every service: **In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.** We see it as we confess our sins and receive the pastor's absolution. But the font can be in more places than in church. Take the font home with you, brothers and sisters. Place it near your bed, put it on your kitchen table, position it on the dashboard of your car. You began your life at the font; now live your life there. **Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.** Amen.

The sermon was preached by Pastor James Tiefel. A video recording of the sermon is available.