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## **The First Sunday after Epiphany**

### **January 8, 2023**

#### **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**

#### **Matthew 3:13-17**

**Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.**

**As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."**

Introduction - I wonder if anyone noticed Jesus as he walked down the river bank to the Jordan. There were always crowds around John the Baptist and I can't believe there weren't crowds on this day. Jesus didn't arrive with a contingent of followers; he came alone. There wasn't anything about Jesus' looks or demeanor that would have attracted attention. From everything we can tell Jesus was just another nameless face in the crowd on that day. No one noticed him.

Well, John the Baptist noticed Jesus as he walked down the river bank. John and Jesus were related through their mothers and they were close in age. Were there chance meetings over the years? Were there extended family gatherings at temple festivals? Did he get the feeling that there was something special about Jesus—his piety or knowledge or the authority in his voice? John admitted later that he hadn't identified Jesus as the promised Messiah, not yet. He knew who Jesus was; he wasn't sure what Jesus was.

A nameless face; an uncertain reputation. But that walk into the Jordan River began a ministry that God had been promising for thousands of years. At his baptism Jesus made his grand entrance; this is where Jesus introduced himself as the Savior of the world. The crowds couldn't have known; even the Baptist wasn't sure at first. But there were others who were absolutely sure. God the Father was sure and God the Holy Spirit was sure. At the baptism of Jesus, we see the amazing appearance of all three persons of the Trinity: The Father is there with his voice; the Son is there in the river; and the Spirit is there as a dove. But we see more than that. The Father is there with his approval; the Son is there in his mission; and the Spirit is there to anoint and empower. Father, Son, and Spirit together at the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan.

“I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Those were the words a pastor spoke when he baptized us many years ago. And so the Holy Trinity still appears in baptism and he appeared at our baptism. The Gospel for today will help us to see that whether there or here, whether then or now,

### **Father, Son, and Spirit Bring Blessings to Baptism**

The Bible shows us Jesus as a baby and little boy. But from the journey to Egypt last Sunday until his baptism on this Sunday we know almost nothing. Of course, Jesus was perfect so he certainly studied the scriptures, he certainly was obedient to his parents, he was industrious at work, he was kind to people around him. But did Jesus know from the start that he was living on earth to be the Savior of the world? He could have known; I mean he was the Son of God. But we also know that Jesus **did not consider equality with God something to be used for his own advantage**. So we can't know what Jesus knew and when he knew it, but at a certain point and in a way we don't understand, Jesus knew it was time to begin. **He came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.**

John's ministry was bustling. His message was consistent: Repent of your sins and prepare yourselves for the one who is coming. People confessed their sins and John baptized them for the gift of forgiveness. Same deal a thousand times. But then all at once Jesus was the next one in line. Something wasn't right about this and John knew it. He tried talking Jesus out of it: **I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?** But Jesus quieted his concerns. **Let it be so now. It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.** John and Jesus each had their assignments. John's task was to baptize Jesus and Jesus' task was to be baptized by John. This was the right thing in God's eyes; this was what God had decided. And this is what John and Jesus carried out.

When Jesus walked into the Jordan, he walked into those waters exactly as all the others had: He walked into the Jordan as a sinner who needed forgiveness. Of course, Jesus wasn't a sinner and he didn't need forgiveness. But on this day Jesus began to carry out the assignment he had agreed to take on: **to be sin for us**, to be the sinner in place of sinners, to be the substitute for sinners. On this day Jesus walked into the Jordan confessing the sins he had taken on himself. And he experienced the forgiveness which God poured out in baptism—not the forgiveness of his sins, but the forgiveness of our sins and the sins of the world. If Jesus was to take up the task to be the substitute for sinners, he needed to do for us what we needed to do—to confess and be baptized. And so the Son of God began his ministry on this day by doing what God the Father expected and demanded: he took our place as chief of sinners.

So it was settled; Jesus was taking on the mission to save. **At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.** So the third person of the Trinity arrived. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus as a peace-loving dove. Of course, Jesus had been conceived by the Holy Spirit, but this time the Spirit came to Jesus to certify him as God's official choice and to equip him for his saving mission. In God's world prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with oil to indicate they were God's choice. On this day Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power and identified as the perfect prophet, priest, and king who had come to preach to all people and to sacrifice himself for all people and to rule all people forever.

God the Son was there: Jesus had accepted the mission. God the Spirit was there; he certified and empowered Jesus to carry out the mission. And then God the Father appeared: **A voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”** The Father's Son walked out of the Jordan determined to be sin for the world. That the Son whom he loved was willing to become the Word made flesh, willing to make himself nothing and become obedient to death, willing to carry the sins of the world—this is what pleased the Father. That he was willing to do this all for us—this is what blesses us.

As the Father, the Son, and the Spirit were there at Jesus' baptism, so they are at our baptisms. This is how Jesus said it should be. He told his followers to **Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**. And this is what his followers have done: We baptize children and adults in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This means that all of the blessings which Jesus' baptism announced and displayed are transferred to those who are baptized. We are baptized into the name of the Triune God and receive all of the blessings that come with that name.

Baptism connects us to everything Jesus did to conquer sin. Baptism connects us to Good Friday for **we are buried with him through baptism into death**. Baptism connects to Easter: **It saves us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ**. Baptism **clothes us with Christ so that we are the children of God through faith**. Baptism **forgives us and washes away our sins**. Baptism connects us with everything God the Father does. Baptism joins us to God's family and makes us inheritors of his blessings. Baptism connects us to God the Holy Spirit; we receive **the gift of the Holy Spirit** which gives us **rebirth and renewal** and puts faith into our hearts. Our baptism gives us all the gifts Jesus set out to give us when he was baptized. Baptism gives us all the gifts the Father planned for us in eternity. Our baptism gives us all the Holy Spirit does day after day to bring us and keep with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. Father, Son, and Spirit bring blessings our baptism because they brought blessings at Jesus' baptism. At our baptisms we were crossed from head to heart and marked as the children of God forever.

Almost every Sunday morning we begin worship by remembering our baptisms. We see the mark of baptism in the sign of the cross and we hear the words of baptism: In the name of the Father and on the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We remember what baptism did for us and we confess what baptism still does for us. We remember the power of baptism and the blessings of baptism and what baptism means: It 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. Amen.