

The Baptism of Our Lord – 2024

Genesis 1:1-5

Romans 6:1-11

Mark 1:4-11

Now it all begins! A new thing is erupting in the old creation. The incarnate Son of God begins His public ministry. At the Jordan; this all begins at the Jordan. The Prophet John is baptizing sinners at the Jordan. John is preparing the way. Sinners being baptized prepares them to receive the King, the Messianic King. Now it all begins. Jesus is 30 years old and He came for one reason – to redeem humanity with His blood. Man needs saving. Sin radically disrupts man's relationship with God. Sin radically disrupts man's standing before his Creator. Sin is death. My sin is my twisted love of death. Sin is alienation from God. Death is alienation from Life. Hell is finality. Hell is alienation from heaven and holiness and God and Life. The Savior had come to act. Now it all begins.

I know a lot about each of you; I really do. Here's one of the things that I know: God's Word has grabbed your heart. There is a certainty in your spirit, in your mind that is borne of God's own Spirit. The veracity of the Biblical narrative isn't a tepid story from which the hearer is detached. God's Word invades the soul of man. Truth becomes undeniable. You have known this internal conviction. You have experienced this internal conviction. John was calling all of Israel to repentance and that Word, that prophetic Word of God, grabbed people and they flocked to John, eager to be baptized. They were like us. They needed what God was providing. They knew it. In their bones, they knew it. Both judgment and grace were in John's voice. To be baptized was to repent. To repent was to be baptized. One couldn't have one without the other. Judgment and grace; sin must be judged and God alone can atone. Grace is what the sinner needs. Grace is what God alone can provide. Repentance flooded their hearts and out they went to John to have their sins washed away.

I like almost all of you (laughter). And every single one of you is a sinner. Most of you like me and y'all know what I am. We're a unified bunch. One of the things that unite us is that we're all fairly jacked up. Good luck finding a friend who is not a sinner. Birds of a feather; sinners flock together; it is impossible for any human relationship not to be sinful birds of a sinful feather. Can you imagine the sins that were being washed off in the Jordan? Sin is not pretty. Selfishness and greed and perversion of the sort that would curdle fresh milk; that filth is in us; that's what was being washed off of sinners in the Jordan river. Thought, word, and deed; we, the human race, are corrupt. And Jesus is holy; intensely, radically, astoundingly holy. What is He doing out at the Jordan? Holy Jesus, holy Son of God, holy Messiah, sinless and omnipotent and eternal and glorious Jesus – what is He doing at the river where sinners have congregated?

Here's the beautiful thing about Christianity. Here's the wondrous thing about God: He loves us; He likes us; He loves us so much that He is willing to identify with us. In all of our circumstance, Jesus is willing to identify with us. Regardless of how we've soiled ourselves, Jesus is eager to identify with us. Jesus stands *with* us; He stands *for* us. That is His nature. He doesn't hold His nose and stand aloof, lobbing imperatives and criticism from afar. Down into the Jordan He goes. Baptized by John; not to receive forgiveness for He is without sin. Not to have sins washed off; Jesus goes into the Jordan to have sins washed on. He takes it; all the filth

in that river; all the sins of those sinners, He takes onto Himself what was washed off of them. Forgiveness comes in no other way than for the Son of God to take it on Himself (2 Corinthians 5:21). He doesn't stand apart. He doesn't put on a hospital gown, protective scrubs. He shoulders our lust and our pride and our deceit and He continues to like us, to love us, to maintain a close, intimate bond to us.

One of the most egregious defects in contemporary man is that he fails to see how his behavior will impact the future. It is true of governments, it is true of fringe activists, and it is true of individuals. Foresight; we don't plan very well. We don't consider the consequences of our choices, we don't anticipate the ramifications of our behaviors, we seldom even endeavor to foresee the effect on tomorrow what we choose to engage in today. You know who's not like us? God is not like us. Do you think that Jesus going down to be baptized by John was just a lark, just a day's adventure, just a spontaneous choice that seemed good at the time? Hardly! Jesus is baptized as the Christ, He receives the Spirit, and His end is a cross. The Lord sees the totality of His path. From the jump, the Lord is totally locked into this path. His baptism in water at the Jordan ends with His baptism in His own blood at Calvary (Luke 12:50). That is what His baptism means. Jesus' baptism is the first part of a blessed exchange, a joyous and wondrous and delightful exchange. He takes our sin. He bears it in His body. He is punished for it on the cross. God judged sin, God poured out His wrath against sin when Jesus hung on that cross. God's fury over all that is corrupt being poured out on His Son – that's what Jesus' baptism means. That is what His baptism *begins*. That is your God who sees more than just one day at a time.

Do you know what Jesus saw? He saw that the Spirit that He received at His baptism He would give up in death. He saw that the Spirit that He gave up in death He would pour out on the church at Pentecost. He saw that the Spirit that He poured out on the church at Pentecost He would give to you when you were baptized into His death and resurrection, when you were washed in His blood, when all of His righteousness was credited to you. That's the other half of the blessed exchange. Everything that rightly belongs to Jesus has been given to you. All of His virtue... yours. He loved God above all things and He loved His neighbor as Himself. That righteousness... it's yours. He saw both parts of this blessed exchange when He was baptized. You and He, bonded by His baptism, forged into one by your baptism, He saw it. That is why He was there, to see John, in solidarity with us, to receive a baptism that convicts and prostitutes and thieves and adulterers and liars and sweet old ladies received.

In your baptism you received the Holy Spirit; amazing! The Holy Spirit dwells in you. God the Holy Spirit has made you His temple (1 Corinthians 6:19). You've been anointed; christed. God has put His seal on you. God is committed to you. He's given you a deposit, a deposit that serves as an earnest gift, a promise of more to come (1 Corinthians 1:22). The Holy Spirit is a guarantee of your inheritance (Ephesians 1:13). What is your inheritance? Heaven, Paradise, eternal life. Just as Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey, so Jesus is leading us to heaven. We have confidence to enter that Most Holy Place (Hebrews 10:19). Christ is our confidence. His flesh is the new and living way (Hebrews 10:20). Your hearts have been sprinkled with the water that flowed from His side as He was pierced (Hebrews 10:22). Your bodies have been washed with the pure water of His grace. You are baptized. You eat His body. You drink His blood. The blessed exchange, that sweet swap,

is now, here, because the Lord Christ identifies with us. Love; He knows you thoroughly and He gives Himself to you and blesses you and all of that makes you beautiful, radiant; it makes you holy.

What began so wonderfully as Jesus took up His vocation as the Christ and was baptized by John, that powerful and priceless salvation is ongoing; it's why we are church. God is with us and He is accomplishing precisely what He wants among us. We've been united to Jesus. We bear witness to Christ as we journey toward heaven. We love and bless and forgive and teach and serve those He gives us to love and bless and forgive and teach and serve. God is glorified in this and our lives are enlarged. I'll say to you what I say to the children in chapel as the service concludes. Always remember this: I love you but Jesus loves you even more.