

The Baptism of Our Lord – 2025

Isaiah 43:1-7

Romans 6:1-11

Luke 3:15-22

One of the best treatments for leukemia is to kill, by chemotherapy, all the unhealthy bone marrow in the diseased patient who then receives a transplant of healthy bone marrow cells from a donor. The donor needs to have genetic markers that approximate the patient's genetic code – the closer the match the better which is why family members are often called upon to render this genuinely life-saving aid. Where there is a high match quotient, the patient's immune system is less likely to reject the donated stem cells. 'Human leukocyte antigens' is the technical term for the proteins found on the surface of cells that help the immune system identify which cells belong to the body and which are foreign. How many of y'all would gladly donate your bone marrow to a family member? I would. There's a small cost involved. The procedure itself is painless as the donor is under a general anesthetic. Afterwards, there is likely to be some fatigue, muscle pain, stiffness (which I have all the time anyway), headaches, and some bruising. Norco would solve all that. Regular activities, for the donor, are returned to in about a week.

How about if we do it differently? The healthy donor gets the diseased bone marrow and the diseased individual gets the healthy bone marrow – a straight swap. Oh, and diseased individual willfully did it to himself. The diseased individual courted leukemia, soaked himself in leukemia, chose leukemia. The healthy donor knows that the swap will kill him. And (AND!) the whole world is the donor's family. This singular donor is the perfect match for Daniel and Susan and Timothy and Janelle and Alonzo and Beatrice and Fernando and Isabelle and Taylor and Mark and they all have leukemia.

All the people are flocking to John to be baptized by him in the Jordan River. John is calling people to repentance. John is announcing that the kingdom of God is at hand and that people are to prepare, to make ready for the Messianic King for He surely approaches. This is John's vocation, his calling. John the Baptist is the one who prepares the way for the Lord. And Jesus is there. It is a beginning. Jesus is prepared to take the mantle of *His* vocation upon Himself in earnest. What is Jesus' vocation? Savior; Jesus is the Christ. True God and true man, Jesus was incarnated for this very purpose and the hour has come. He's the donor. A swap is in the offing, a blessed exchange. It's not a cancer; it is sin. It's not a bone marrow disease; it is literally God's wrath, punishment for sin, and Jesus is prepared to stand under that judgment. He Himself has no sin. This is holy God, the holy and most righteous Son of God – the Creator and Preserver of all that is. He is the architect and the embodiment of purity, love, and unending power. And this Savior, in solidarity with sinful man, as an innocent sacrifice, goes down in the water of the Jordan River and is baptized by John.

Do you know the sins that the ancients committed? Are you aware of the sins that are prevalent in our culture, in your heart and in your behavior? The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). God is just and sin is to be punished. Death is no picnic beneath the judgment of God. On one occasion, as the priests were beginning their ministry in the OT, a sacrifice was offered for the sins of the people (Leviticus 9:22-24 NIV). Fire came from the presence of God. His glory was manifest and this fire consumed the sacrifice. God hates sin. The omnipotent Creator of the

universe hates sin. The innocent substitute, the sacrifice was offered for the sins of the people and fire came from the presence of God and that fire consumed the sacrifice. The people saw this fusion of justice and mercy and they shouted for joy as they fell on their faces. Why shout for joy? One reason, one simple and powerful and obvious reason. It was their sin that was punished but it was the innocent substitute that bore God's fury against their sin.

The people who were baptized by John were adulterers and thieves and drunkards and liars and idolaters. Sin is not always something that we just "fall into." Sometimes sin is something that we pursue with deliberate intention. The ancient Israelites broke every commandment of God, beginning with the first one. John baptized them. Their sins were washed off (Luke 3:3). And Jesus goes into that water and begins His ministry as the Christ. I put garbage in my cans and I put my cans on the curb. A delightful truck comes by once a week and mechanically eliminates the garbage from the Smith household and everyone else on my block. I have no idea where those public servants take my trash. Somewhere out of sight, it is taken and buried and forgotten. And the next week the whole enterprise is reprised. Where does my sin go? There's no public utility that comes in and cleans my soul of the refuse that has built up. Where does my sin go? Jesus said this: "I have come to bring fire on the earth and how I wish that it were already kindled. But I have a baptism with which to be baptized and how distressed I am until it is complete" (Luke 12:49-50). That's a reference to His death. The fire is the radical and just judgment of His Father's wrath against sin. Jesus is the innocent substitute. My sin goes on Him. My sin wasn't taken away discreetly and buried. It was put on Christ and He very publicly suffered. I didn't put it there. A merciful God put it there.

When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan He wasn't having sins washed off, He was having sins washed on (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus is the receptacle for humanity's filth. I didn't coordinate this grace. No mere mortal dreamed up this design of atonement. Your Creator designed this exchange (Isaiah 53:5). Christ crucified embodied sin – yours and mine. As He was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the form of a dove and the Father's magnificent voice was heard: "You are my beloved Son. With you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). Jesus baptism in the Jordan River is the prelude, the divine prelude to His baptism in His own blood at Calvary. The fire of God's wrath was unseen there, but present. The innocent substitute cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). It's a mystery, but the Father's love never leaves the Son even as He punished our sin as Jesus hangs on the cross. The Lord Christ takes your diseased bone marrow, your sin (greed, lust, selfishness, deceit, indifference to your fellow man and on and on). That's the first part of the exchange. What's the second part?

You are given Christ's holiness (2 Corinthians 5:17). Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Luke 3:16). The fire that was destructive to Jesus now is a refining fire. Jesus is your match. He is your donor. He was made man in such a way as to be all of our matches. Perfect God and perfect man, He donates His holiness to you as you are baptized into His death and resurrection (Romans 6:1-11). Looking at you, God is well pleased. You are my beloved son, my beloved daughter. With you I am well pleased. Our Father is well pleased with Mark and Javier and Tiffany and Genevieve and Sally and Keith and Maggie and Donny and Laura and Leo. A blessed exchange; your sin is truly taken away; you are truly holy – God's work, God's marvelous, grace-laden work.

The heavens are opened (Luke 3:21). The way back home is no longer barred (Genesis 3:24). As the curtain in the Temple was torn when the Lord died, so the heavens were opened as the Lord was baptized (Matthew 27:51). When we baptize someone we make them citizens of heaven. This body of believers are citizens of heaven. We are making our way home. We are now in a season where our beloved brothers and sisters are going home. Our losses are real. The losses of those in the path of the catastrophic fires are real. Those losses will reverberate for a long time, but they are temporary. All losses for a Christian are temporary. Job suffered mightily, and at the end it all came back to him, plus interest. When heaven is your home, when God's grace surrounds you, you are an epiphany to the world. Trust makes you strong. Hope makes you useful. Love makes you an asset of uncommon value. Christ's holiness is not ethereal or abstract or something to put in a glass case and admired. Christ's holiness is practical and tangible and it is put to use. Christ's holiness is in you and you are, by virtue of His work, a vessel of hope and truth and light. Be engaged. Be aware of what God has done and let your light shine (Matthew 5:16). The physical losses around us will find physical solutions. People's pain will be addressed. For our part, let hope abound. Medicine for our world... Christ's hope, Christ's life, Christ's holiness. The world's donor, the world's perfect match, is continuing to give His life. That is the strength that we all need. That is the strength that is dispensed here.