

Christ's Baptism, Our Sanctification

Texts: Isaiah 42:1-9

Acts 10:34-43 (Series A. Baptism of Our Lord) Ps. 29

Matthew 3:13-17

Prayer:

"Suddenly the sky opened up and He saw the Spirit of God descend like a dove"

Sometimes we aren't sure if "now" is the right time for things. At the age 30 years Jesus stood at the banks of Jordan river, now was the time. If we could go back and stand on the shoreline of that river in the wilderness, we would be nodding our head in agreement, *"Yes, now is the time!"* Time for what? It is time for Jesus to be baptized.

He hadn't been baptized as an infant as many times we see in our worship services. His baptism was different. He was baptized for a totally different reason than our reason for baptizing.

This morning I want to take a step back and look at baptism. I want us to first imagine we are standing on the banks of Jordan River and we see Jesus steps into the water. He's saying, *"Now is the time!"* It's time for two things: first. For Jesus to step in line with sinners; and second. For the Father to state a line of acceptance.

God is calling Him into His public ministry and Jesus is answering, *"Yes! Yes!!"* God is guiding Him toward complete fulfillment of His life's mission and Jesus is following that guidance.

This is so important an event in Jesus' life that many theologians insist that the rest of the Gospel is simply a living out of what happened here at the baptism. Endless sermons can be preached on what this meant to Jesus. But we need to know now what it means to us.

In the same manner we see that God does call us and God does lead us, and God does guide us. I am talking about us right now. This moment, there is an influence in your life in my life coming from God Himself. God is seeking to guide you into the fullness of life.

God's guidance may sometimes take us by surprise. Usually, it comes to those who are seeking it and this is exactly what Jesus is doing by submitting to the ritual of Baptism. John protests to Jesus: *"I should be baptized by You, yet You come to me!"* And Jesus answers, it is ok.

We must do this if we would fulfill all of God's demands" (Mt.3:15). He is telling John that His only purpose is to identify with God, to seek His guidance, and to follow it. To our own great misfortune, we spend too little effort in seeking God's guidance.

There are those who are unwilling to spend time being alone: quiet time during which they can reflect seriously on who they are, what they are doing and what they ought to be doing. There are those who not only don't take time to seek God's guidance, they don't want God's guidance. They want to have it their own way. They want their wills to prevail over God's.

There are those who go through the motions of praying for God's guidance, but because they don't want it really, their prayers are non-prayers. Non-prayers are prayed by giving God a lot of information you somehow imagine He doesn't already have, and then telling Him what to do with it. Prayer is being open to God: *"What does God want for me?"*

It is beautiful to see the ministry of Jesus unfold from the moment of His baptism. The clear guidance, the call that comes, the confirmation, and then, the Ministry of Love. Whenever you read this passage, I hope you will think some more on what it meant to Jesus and that it will enrich your understanding of who He is. But most of all, I hope you will think about what it means to you, and your baptism.

The incredible thing about this is that in the midst of all the pressures of this complex society, in the midst of all the decisions we have to make day-in and day-out, in the midst of giving advice to others and receiving advice from others, we will sometimes overlook the best guidance we will ever get.

It is the most reliable. It is ever-present. And it would not disappoint us. The Lord God Almighty Himself, He who created us and sustains us, will guide us faithfully into the way of wholeness of life. *“Trust the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight”* (Proverb 3:5-6).

We’re now in a fast-forward mode. Two days ago, the Magi visited the Christ Child in Bethlehem, leaving town in a hurry to avoid Herod. In between then and now Joseph received a dream that caused him to take Mary and the Child to Egypt to seek refuge as Herod was killing all the children under two. It was after Herod’s death that Joseph, Mary, and Jesus returned to settle in Nazareth.

Of course, the “real” time for these events took several years. But the Church Calendar moves swiftly. We now pick up where we left off in Advent just after John the Baptist called the Pharisees and Sadducees a “brood of vipers” for their false piety when they presented themselves for Baptism.

John is a God-sent prophet to warn them to turn away from their corruption. As he says *“one more powerful than I, is coming”* and this Sunday, Jesus, now a grown man beginning his public ministry comes to John for Baptism.

But why Jesus asked to be baptized? Even John wonders and is reluctant. After all Jesus is without sin; God’s own Son brought to human incarnation to lead Israel from the old Law of Moses into the new Way of The Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40).

Jesus prevails ~ As Jesus rises from the water, Matthew tells us that God announces from on high, *“This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”* and that the Holy Spirit descended as a dove to mark this man Jesus as God-sent, of God-nature, One with God, God’s own Human Image.

In this awakening season of Epiphany, let us begin again to discover and define our own public and private ministry. With the glitter of Christmas put away, all the turmoil in every corner of the world claims our attention or repels us and it’s easy to be distracted and distanced from the calling of Jesus.

Whether you were officially baptized or not, take some time to think about Baptism and its deep significance. For many Christians, though not all, Baptism is a Sacrament of Purification, a Rite of Initiation, a formal adoption into the Christian faith.

A simple definition is that the word comes from a mixture of Latin and Greek and literally means "washing." This Sacrament is intended to be a means of and a visible form of God's grace, just as the dove descending was for Jesus. It was, for Jesus, the beginning of his journey as Messiah.

We also cannot forget and should forget that adoption is a key component of baptism as well. In baptism, we are claimed by God as God's own and we are sealed with the sign of the cross on our foreheads. Baptism is as much a symbol of adoption as it is of forgiveness.

And in the baptism of our Lord, all those gathered around that day at the Jordan were hearers of the voice from heaven exclaiming, "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" In baptism, we too are made to be like children of God in that we are sealed for this purpose.

Even Jesus was baptized—this should give us an indication of the importance of baptism in the life of a Christian. It is this purpose that caused Jesus to submit to baptism.

In *Holy Baptism*. The five questions* are asked along with the five promises* that are part of the *Baptismal Covenant*, these questions and promises are our operating principles, our acceptance of our charge and responsibilities as followers of Jesus.

They are intensely serious and not meant as mere platitudes in a sweet ceremony. We really need revisit our baptismal covenant to remind us of what we might need to work on, a chance to reflect on how we managed at the end of a day or a month, an opportunity to renew our own commitment to Christ.

One or more of them may even point to possibilities to shape our mindset for daily activities, or perhaps a new direction in vocation or volunteering as we make our way through our brief human existence.

Inclusion: Here they are to refresh our memory: *The Celebrant asks the following questions of the candidates who can speak for themselves, and of the parents and godparents who speak on behalf of the infants and younger children.*

- Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God? *I renounce them.*
- Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God? *I renounce them.*
- Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God? *I renounce them.*
- Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior? *I do.*
- Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love? *I do.*
- Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord? *I do.*
- Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? *I will, with God's help.*

My favorite part of this Sacrament is near the end, after all the words have been spoken and the water has been poured. It is then that the Celebrant takes the holy oil and anoints the forehead of the one Baptized. With the words: you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever.

Whether by actual Baptism or a Baptism of desire, whether or not officially anointed, we are each claimed as *Christ's own forever*. As mortal beings we will fail and fall away yet we can and may always return to the One who raises us with Him. Our hearts love to claim the Babe in the Manger.

God's guidance is what makes it possible for us to find our own special corner of the sky. God's guidance is what makes it possible for us to "*keep working on love.*" *Christ's Baptism is our Sanctification / Set apart to keep working on Love.*

Now was the time for God to state his line of acceptance of his own Son. Look at what that means for us. It now means that God accepts us. Because of what Jesus did with his perfect life, the punishing death, and his victorious rising from the dead, God accepts you and me.

Christ Jesus came to our world in order to bring us to his world. Let us now stake our soul's claim to the Christ who leads us on His Way to our Salvation whatever comes during our earthly lives.

With a big smile God says, *"I accept the offer. You can be near me forever."* When we see Jesus' baptism and remember our own baptism, "Now is the time." Now is the time to rejoice over the fact God accepts our substitute.

All these events surrounding Jesus' baptism were done so that you and I can confidently state, *"Now I know that God accepts me."* Do you know this in your heart today? Do you?

Love has feet of taking out the Good news to the poor,
Love has eyes to see the needy, love has Ears to hear the hurting and,
Love has hands of compassion.

Amen.

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