

"The Humble Miracle of Baptism"

Text: Luke 3:15-17,21-22

"May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." Amen. (1 Peter 5:10)

Dear Fellow Christians, Bond Servants of God in heaven, there is little doubt that you know the date of your birth. Do you also know the date of your re-birth? More than just knowing the date, which do you value more highly, your birth or your rebirth (baptism)? On the day you were born, you entered the world as a sinner, condemned by God for the sins with which you were born. On the day of your baptism you were reborn of water and of the Spirit. You were born not into the kingdom of men, but into the kingdom of God. In that sense, the event of your baptism is of much greater value (and therefore much more important) than the event of your birth. While it is not critical to know the exact date of your baptism, surely the event itself is and ought to be vitally important and comforting to every Christian.

This morning we focus on baptism in general and a very special baptism in particular, for on this Sunday we commemorate the baptism of our Lord Jesus. Here we find ourselves a bit confused, for although *our* sins were washed away in the waters of baptism, Jesus had no sin. Nor should we think of baptism as some sort of legal requirement Jesus had to fulfill before he could call himself perfect and holy. What then are we to learn from Jesus' baptism? What does it teach us? What does it reveal to us about Jesus? About us? These questions and others we seek to answer as we study our text for this morning, found recorded in the Gospel of Luke, the Third Chapter:

Luke 3:15-17,21-22 Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, ¹⁶ John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire." ²¹ ¶ When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. ²² And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a

voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

So far the very words of our God. What comfort is inspired by the knowledge that these words are true and right in every regard, and therefore worthy of our intense study and meditation. That we might gain the full benefit of these words, so we pray, **"Sanctify us through Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!" Amen.**

As in any epic struggle, just when you think that one side has gained an insurmountable advantage – some edge that will surely guarantee success – the other side counters with some valiant effort or unforeseen strategy and the struggle continues. Such was the case also in the ultimate struggle between God and Satan over the souls of men. When God established baptism, first with John the Baptist and later with all of the New Testament disciples, he gave to the Church a most formidable weapon. How simple, and yet how powerfully complex was this rare gift to mankind. With the Word of God attached to simple water, great things could be accomplished – spectacular, supernatural wonders. Souls could be rescued from the kingdom of the devil and placed instead on the shining path of life eternal. When God gave such a simple and powerful weapon to mankind, the depths of hell itself must have been shaken by the raw power and potency of this simple sacrament. Surely baptism, powered by the Word of God, would act as a terrible scythe that would decimate the ranks of Satan's kingdom.

How then is it possible that such a powerful, life-changing tool has been tossed on the scrap heap of outdated religious relics by our modern society? We ought not be surprised. In any such struggle (where one side fights with the fury of the damned) if we have learned anything at all it is that the devil will spare no effort in this truly epic confrontation. We should have known that he would hurl himself against this great weapon, this humble miracle of baptism, with all of his considerable fury, wrath and cunning.

And hurl himself he did. What is more, his success has been nothing short of amazing. Where God intended the sacrament to be a pure and powerful working of the gospel, Satan has succeeded in convincing those both inside and outside of the Christian Church of everything *but* the truth. Countless millions now regard baptism as a meritorious work that man does to earn a spiritual benefit. Others believe that it is just another obligation or legal requirement (law) that man must fulfill before he can be considered worthy, in God's eyes, of

heaven. And those are just the attacks from within the Church. The world condescendingly dismisses Christian baptism altogether as quaint mythology for the simple-minded – a cute little custom with all the charm and power of four leaf clovers and dream catchers.

Baptism, as God himself describes it in his Holy Word, is **"the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."** Because of the Word of God connected to the simple water, Baptism represents a power beyond the comprehension of mortal man. Its very simplicity, however, belies its great effectiveness. This too ought not surprise us. Remember how Naaman nearly rejected the cure offered by Elisha the Prophet because of its very simplicity? **"Go and wash seven times in the Jordan River,"** Elisha told him, **"and you will be cleansed."** Great Naaman turned away in contempt, offended by the simplicity of the cure. Only his good and faithful servants saved him from his own folly.

So it is with man and the gospel – which certainly is part of the devil's strategy. If he can convince mankind that the true gospel is too childish to actually work, he will have succeeded in persuading man to slam shut the only door to paradise.

The fact is the gospel in general, and baptism in particular, *are* that simple. God himself is complex beyond our comprehension or imagination, but not so with the plan he set down for our salvation. That plan is simple. Though we rebelled against him by sinning, he sent his only Son to pay our spiritual debt – our *sin* debt. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, paid our debt by first becoming man, being born of the virgin, Mary. He then lived a perfectly sinless life, and then gave that life as a blood sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. God the Father accepted that gift as payment in full for all sins, and he credits that payment to each of us. The credit becomes our personal own the moment the Holy Spirit works saving faith in our hearts. Believing that Jesus has indeed paid for your sins, forgiveness and salvation are yours, fully and completely.

That is where baptism comes into the picture. How does the Holy Spirit create such faith? For the most part that remains a mystery to our frail human intellects. It is enough for us to know that he does, in fact, create such faith. Many things may be beyond our understanding, but what we *do* know is that he has chosen to work faith in our hearts through "means." That is, he did not choose to work *directly* (from heaven to heart) but through the divinely inspired words of the Bible (the "means"). **"Faith comes by hearing,"** we read in Romans 10:17, **"and hearing by the Word of God."** In other words, faith comes not directly from heaven,

but by hearing the message of the gospel, the message that is contained in the words of God recorded in the Bible.

Baptism, then, is a simple tool that God gave us for the application of his powerful Word. As Luther put it, *"Without the Word of God you have simple water only – no baptism. With the Word of God, it is baptism; that is, a gracious water of life and renewing of the Holy Spirit."* Baptism then is a *means* whereby even the smallest infant can experience the application of the word of grace – the very power that can and does bring a dead soul to saving faith. Again, how exactly the Holy Spirit accomplishes this great miracle is a mystery. We need to bear in mind, however, that it is God the Holy Spirit who works this miracle in our hearts, not we ourselves. Many are confused as to how an infant can come to faith. The misunderstanding actually lies not in baptism but in faith itself. Man naturally credits himself with coming to faith, imagining that it is some sort of rational acceptance of facts – something apparently therefore beyond the ability of an infant. The miracle of faith, however, is accomplished by the Holy Spirit working through the Word in the heart of man. Sinful man is the recipient of this miraculous gift, not the source or worker of the miracle.

Now, other than the fact that our text mentions baptism, what does all of this have to do with the main message of our text for this morning – the Baptism of Jesus? Interestingly enough, this brief study of baptism raises questions concerning our text before it then goes on to answer those same questions. How so?

If we regard baptism as a means whereby the Holy Spirit creates saving faith in the heart of man, why was Jesus baptized? Didn't he already believe? Next question, if we now rightly regard baptism as the tool designed to carry sinners from death to life, why again was Jesus baptized? He had no sin. If, finally, we now rightly regard baptism as a gracious invitation on the part of our God to participate, through faith, in his kingdom of Grace (rather than a command that has to be fulfilled or obeyed by man) then, again, why was Jesus baptized? Jesus had faith, but he didn't need faith to save himself. He earned eternal Life, both for himself and for us, through his actions. Since baptism was not one of those legal requirements, again, why was Jesus baptized?

As we said, a study of our text both raises these questions and then answers them. Jesus' baptism wasn't his attempt to fulfill a law, it was first an anointing, second an association, and third a beginning.

Jesus' baptism was, first, an anointing. In Bible times, these classes of people were anointed: prophets, priests, and kings. The anointing was a divinely commanded rite or ceremony demonstrating that God had made his choice for a given office. (David, for example, was anointed by the Prophet Samuel to be Israel's second king.) Jesus actually served us in all three capacities – prophet, priest, and king. His baptism was his anointing; it was God the Father's verification that Jesus was, in fact, the promised one, the *Christ*. (The name *Christ*, remember means, "*the anointed one*.") So it was that God added both the visible and audible proof at the time of Jesus' anointing in baptism. God the Father made clear just who Jesus was when he said, "***You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.***" Jesus was baptized, therefore, as an anointing. God, as with a great finger from heaven, pointed to his Son and declared, "*You are the One Promised of old; you are the Christ, the Anointed One!*"

Jesus' baptism also served as an *association* – a statement by Jesus of his connection to all human beings. In Galatians 4:4-5 we read, "***But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.***" It is a great and humbling mystery that Jesus, himself God from all eternity, made himself one of us. He left heaven to come and stand by our side – literally. He came to do for us what we could not, would not, do for ourselves. In submitting also to John's baptism – a thing that surprised even John himself – Jesus was also demonstrating a oneness with us. The One who had no sin, had come to stand by our side and to take our sin upon himself.

Finally, Jesus' baptism represented not only an anointing and an association, it was a *beginning* – the beginning of his public ministry. God himself chose 30 years of age as the point at which his servants officially began their ministries (Numbers 4). Jesus too was thirty years old when he was baptized, and this event clearly marks the beginning of his public ministry – a ministry that would last only three short years and end (as far as the world was concerned) with his shameful execution as a common criminal outside of Jerusalem. Jesus, also in his baptism, "***fulfilled all righteous***" – just as he was also circumcised and ceremonially cleansed earlier in his life. In short, he fulfilled every single aspect of life that pleased God the Father. And he did so for you and me, as our Savior and Substitute.

In all of this, once again, Jesus alone is magnified, and Jesus alone deserves to be glorified by all mankind. If not for Jesus, we would all be lost forever, every single one of us. We would be doomed to a hopeless,

raging agony for all eternity. We had greatly displeased our God in heaven, but Jesus regained the Father's love for us through his perfect obedience. The Father gave evidence of this in our text when he said "***You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.***" Indeed, God was so "well pleased" with Jesus that he has declared each one of us to be innocent of sin because of him. He was so "well pleased" that he has invited each of us to share heaven with him. So well pleased that he now calls us "his children" – brothers with Jesus, and fellow heirs of eternal paradise. Thanks be to Jesus for doing all things well, and for securing for each of us a share in his heaven. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 43:1-7 But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called *you* by your name; You *are* Mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I *will be* with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. ³ For I *am* the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. ⁴ Since you were precious in My sight, You have been honored, And I have loved you; Therefore I will give men for you, And people for your life. ⁵ Fear not, for I *am* with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, And gather you from the west; ⁶ I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not keep them back!' Bring My sons from afar, And My daughters from the ends of the earth -- ⁷ Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him."

Romans 6:1-11 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵ ¶ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to

God. ¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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The First Sunday in Epiphany – January 10, 2010

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -#99- (Red Hymnal)
"Now Are the Days Fulfilled"

The Order of Morning Service – Red Hymnal page 15.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back of the bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 43:1-7) Our First Lesson applies obviously to Israel in the near-term, but ultimately to God's Son, Jesus Christ – who is the heart and soul of the entire Old Testament. The words also apply to God's children today, who are indeed precious in his sight.

The Epistle Lesson: (Romans 6:1-11) Our baptism ought daily to remind us that we there died to sin, and that sin should no longer control us or dictate our actions. As Paul put it in our 2nd lesson:
"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed (Red Hymnal page 22)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#301- (Red Hymnal)

"He that Believes and Is Baptized"

The Sermon - Text: : Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Humble Miracle of Baptism"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) – Red Hymnal page 22

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn -#307- (Red Hymnal)

"Draw Nigh and Take the Body of the Lord"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24)

The Distribution -#305- (Red Hymnal)

"Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness"

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 29)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -#313- (Verses 1 & 3) (Red Hymnal)

"O Lord, We Praise Thee"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!

To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Last Sunday (42) 2010 Average (42)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Adult Bible Study
Next Sunday	-8:45 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

Another Victory – On Saturday we celebrated the victory of life over death in connection with the transfer of Les Weiss to his heavenly home. Our prayers remain with his family during this difficult time of adjustment, even while we rejoice that our dear brother has gone home.

CLC News – Pastor Michael Gurath has returned the call to Fairchild, WI.

Church Council Meeting – Council members are reminded of the meeting following the Fellowship Hour this morning.

Copy Machine Announcement – Chairman McEnroe is scheduled to address the congregation briefly after the service this morning on the need to replace our copy machine and some of the options open to us. Please prayerfully consider how you might help.