

**The Baptism of Our Lord, January 10, 2021**

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**His Baptism Makes All the Difference**

Mark 1:9–15

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*

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**In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan River. And when He came up out of the water, immediately He saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.”** (vv 9–11)

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Jesus was baptized. What is this to us? Some think that the purpose of Jesus’ baptism is to serve as an example for us. Their argument goes like this: Jesus was baptized, so we should be baptized, too. In addition, Jesus was baptized as an adult by immersion, they say, so we should be baptized as adults by immersion, too. For some reason, they don’t take this to its logical conclusion: Jesus was baptized when He was about thirty years old by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, so we should be baptized at about thirty years old by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, too. The entire argument fails. It’s impossible for us to be baptized the way Jesus was, just as impossible as it is for any of us to be Jesus.

The baptism of Jesus does have a lot to do with Holy Baptism, but it’s not the reason we baptize. We baptize because Jesus tells us to do it. He said, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”** (Matt 28:19). We also baptize because of the promise Jesus gives: **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved”** (Mark 16:16). And we baptize because we need, we desperately need, the forgiveness of sins, the rescue from death and the devil, and the eternal salvation found there. The promise is for us and for our children, so we bring our children to Jesus that He might take them in His arms and bless them, too.

Jesus’ baptism is different because of who He is. He is true man and true God. Let’s start with his humanity. To enter the water and be baptized, He had to be a real human being—composed of a rational soul and human flesh. Baptism requires a body. In His case, the body conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He is like us in every way—in every way except one. He has no sin. His is a human nature but not a

sinful human nature. This makes His baptism different. All the other people from Judea and Jerusalem who sought out John in the wilderness for baptism, all of them came **confessing their sins** (v 5). They came because John proclaimed **a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins** (v 4). It was their sinful nature that drove them into the water. But Jesus had no sin to confess, and He needed no forgiveness. So why is He baptized? Why is He in the water?

For one thing, the baptism of Jesus reveals who He is, just as the star revealed Him to the magi. At His baptism, we see that this Man is also God—God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, as we say in the Creed. The heavens were torn open, showing that Jesus comes from heaven. The Holy Spirit descended on Him, showing that Jesus is the One on whom the Spirit rests. He has the Holy Spirit without measure. And a voice came from heaven—the voice of God the Father—saying, **“You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased”** (v 11), showing that Jesus is very Son of God. God’s Son not by adoption or in name only but by nature. All three persons of the Holy Trinity are involved in what Jesus does. As the beloved Son, He does the Father’s will and is led by the Spirit. This is true of His temptation in the wilderness, which immediately follows His baptism. It’s also true of His ministry—His preaching and healing and suffering and dying.

So the baptism of Jesus reveals Him and leads into everything that follows. He now enters His ministry. He begins the journey that leads to the cross. He comes to save His people. As He goes to the Jordan River for baptism, we can already look ahead with Him to what comes after. We see Lent ahead—this year Ash Wednesday is February 17. We see the suffering that awaits Him. Beyond the horizon is Good Friday, April 2, and then the new morning of our Lord’s resurrection on April 4. This is where Jesus is headed. He is baptized for this death and resurrection. He is marked as the perfect Lamb of God. He is chosen as the Lamb for the sacrifice. He is the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

Now back to Jesus in the water. I’ve said that His baptism has something to do with our baptisms. I’ve also said that it’s different than our baptisms. These are like the opposite sides of a coin. Jesus gets heads. We get tails. He enters the water alive and comes out to die. We are brought to the water dead in trespasses and sins and come out alive. How can baptismal water do the great things that Scripture claims? Because of what is in the water. The benefits of baptism are there because Jesus is there. He puts the gifts in the water. They came in with Him. He’s the filter through which the water runs. He attracts the filth and the pollutants to Himself and leaves the water pure and holy for us. Because of Jesus, Holy Baptism is a blessed flood and a lavish washing away of all sin.

Jesus puts the promise into baptism. We receive the promise put there. What's good for us is bad for Him. He lets our sins wash over Him. We watch our sins wash away. He goes to meet death and the devil. We are rescued from them. He suffers eternal condemnation and is damned. We inherit eternal salvation. Jesus was baptized not to be an example for us to follow but to be our Savior. We are baptized to be saved. We don't need to be baptized *like* Jesus. We have something better. We are baptized *with* Him.

Through baptism, Jesus identified Himself with us sinners and our sins. When all the people came to John, confessing their sins, Jesus also came to John, confessing their sin, too. He didn't confess their sin in the way that we confess other people's sin. Too often we want to draw attention to their sin, point it out, and humiliate them. Jesus didn't do that. He confessed their sin as His own. He put their confession in His own mouth. He took the sin of the world on His back. He carried the sins of all to His cross.

Because Jesus is in the water, we are baptized with Him. Being baptized with Jesus is what makes baptism so marvelous. The Spirit of God hovers over the face of the waters. The voice of God—His Word—thunders over the waters. The light shines forth in Holy Baptism. It sounds like the creation. It is, in a way! But it's not the first day of creation. It's the eighth day, the beginning of the new creation. We count the six days of the original creation, the seventh day of rest and then the fall, and the eighth day when Christ rose from the dead. This is why baptismal fonts have eight sides. It reminds us that through baptism we are a new creation in Christ, the risen Lord. Baptized into Christ, the old, sinful nature is put to death and we rise to walk in newness of life.

To be baptized with Jesus is to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit descended on Him. So you can be assured that the Holy Spirit has come upon you. To be baptized with Jesus is to be beloved of the Father and well pleasing to Him, not because of anything we've done but Jesus is beloved and well pleasing and we are with Him. So you can be assured of this as well, that you are beloved by the Father and well-pleasing to Him. This is the confidence and comfort of baptism.

In the Collect of the Day, we asked God to make us faithful in our calling as His baptized children. We think of our calling to inherit eternal life. This is especially important to remember right now. We know what awaits us in the future—beyond the turmoil and trouble of this world. Through baptism, we have an inheritance waiting for us, an eternal inheritance. We are also called to be sons of the Father, children of God. One of the privileges we have as children of the heavenly Father is the privilege to pray to Him. The world doesn't think much of this, but it is a precious gift. We have access to the throne of God! So let's make us of this gift by praying for ourselves, our neighbors, and our nation.

What I urge on you today is that you remember your baptism with Jesus. Remember what lies ahead for you as a dear baptized child of God. Remember the privilege that you have as sons of God. And consider also this: Though Jesus went through suffering and death, the Father raised Him from the dead. He was vindicated. In this way, Jesus is an example for us. No matter what suffering, pain, or sorrow may be in the past or still in the future, our Father will vindicate us in the end, too. There is life and joy and peace ahead. At your baptism, Jesus opened the heavens to you. They are still open. You may not see it yet, but you will. Like St. Stephen, you will see the heavens opened and Jesus seated on the throne, reigning and ruling over all things, just as He is doing right now.

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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