

BAPTISM OF OUR LORD
Matthew 3:13-17; Romans 12:1-5

John came **“preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”** (Mark 1:4). And now here was Jesus, coming forward to be baptized, and it didn’t make sense. John was **“preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,”** Jesus had no sin, nothing of which to repent. He was the only person in the New Testament era who needed no Baptism, but we need it, and John didn’t quite get that yet. And so he objected, **“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”** John needed a sinner’s Baptism, not Jesus. John needed to repent, not Jesus. “Who am I, then,” he thought, “to baptize the spotless Lamb of God with a sinner’s Baptism?” But Jesus would not be stopped. John needed to be baptized. That was true. But John needed Jesus to be baptized as well. **“Let it be so now,”** Jesus said, **“for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”**

And wasn’t that what our Jesus was always about: fulfilling all righteousness for us? He was conceived in the Virgin’s womb to fulfill all righteousness for us, born in Bethlehem to fulfill all righteousness for us, circumcised on the eighth day to fulfill all righteousness for us, and now, as He begins His public ministry for sinners—He who was **born of a woman, born under law, to redeem us under the law**—to be baptized for us, just as He would die and rise for us as well. .

When we filled out member information forms for our records earlier in my ministry here, one of the questions was when you were baptized. Do you remember? I know a lot of us didn’t. But we remember our birthday, don’t we? We remember our anniversary, don’t we? I hope we do, fellow husbands. I even remember most of the years my favorite teams have had big wins. We remember important dates, but how easily don’t we forget about our Baptism, and not only the day when we were baptized, but also each day to live it out.

Baptism is not just something we do to confess our faith. That is surely part of it, but Baptism is primarily something God does for us. He marks us with the cross of Christ. He makes us a new creation and grants us citizenship in His kingdom. He begins to renew us in His image, granting us His Spirit. He opens our hearts and minds to His will. And yes, as with Job, He allows us to enter a struggle—a necessary struggle. In our fallen state we didn’t even think to struggle, or realize there should be a struggle, but now we struggle with our own sinful natures, with temptations in the world, and with the old evil foe, the devil.

But our God also equips us. By His Spirit’s presence and His Son’s example, he teaches how to ask first, not what is best for me, but what is to the glory of God and for the benefit of my neighbor. And sometimes that serves me well also, but sometimes that brings me no immediate benefit. And that’s all right. That’s part of growing and maturing in the new birth granted us by water and the Word, just as

any child grows and matures. Part of the Christian life is learning to come to terms with the fact that life is about more than me and here and now, and that what matters most is not what always at first seems to matter most to me. How can we truly ponder the cross and not realize that? What did St. Paul write in our second lesson to the baptized in Rome, after all? ***“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”***

What does Baptism mean? Do you remember your Catechism? I hope so. When we can't remember the basics of the Faith, it's time to review them. **“Baptism means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”**

St. Peter wrote, ***“A dog returns to its vomit, and, ‘A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud’”*** (2 Peter 2:22). Sin gets easier with practice, doesn't it? That's what he means. We slowly dull our conscience. We get so good at sinning that we eventually commit some sins without even thinking. We can damn someone to hell for cutting us off in traffic without so much as a second's hesitation. We can lash out at those who love us over the most trivial things without so much as a scruple. We can neglect our homework or sluff off at work in our God-given vocations without so much as a second thought. Sin gets easier and easier for sinners, because it is what comes natural to us apart from Christ, until sin has such a grasp on us that the thoughts and words and actions that take the greatest effort and focus, and perhaps even so much that they hardly seem worth it, are the thoughts and words and acts of Christ and His Word. And how could it be any differently when first things have no longer been first. When our heart is not right with God, how can it rightly, sincerely, and truly be in anything else? Those constantly tempted need constantly cleaning, and so Luther says we should daily drown the old Adam. Those constantly tempted need constant encouragement, and so we regularly hear preaching and commune.

Today Christ, who needed no Baptism, was baptized for you. He who had no sin received a sinner's Baptism in order, by His Baptism, to fill yours with mercy and grace. He stepped into the muddy waters of the Jordan to wash you clean—heart, mind, and soul—again and again as you stumble back to His cross and empty tomb through repentance. And so you are not those who merely were baptized, but are baptized, part of a flock and under a Shepherd, showered with forgiveness and dressed with righteousness for heaven. Amen.