

The Water's Fine

Scriptures: Isaiah 42:1-9; Matthew 3:13-17

Baptism

Today is a special day in the Church calendar. Every year on the Sunday after Epiphany, the Church celebrates Baptism of the Lord Sunday. It provides us an opportunity to examine the baptism of Jesus Christ, and to reaffirm our baptismal vows, which we'll do towards the end of our time together this morning. Baptism is a sacrament of the Church – and all followers of Jesus Christ, regardless of denominational label, are baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Baptism for us, is what circumcision was for Jews – it's the outward sign of an inward grace – a mark showing we are in a covenant relationship with God. Two essential elements are involved in baptism. Water and the Spirit. Water reminds us of the cleansing from sin. And with the Spirit, it reminds us of the death of our old nature and burial in the tomb with Christ, and the new birth we receive as image-bearers of God.

Baptism, in the life of Christians, is a big deal. It's reassurance for us, that whatever happens to us, God is with us, and gives us the strength to overcome adversity. I've had the privilege of baptizing seven or eight people here since being licensed as your pastor in February, 2021. Thursday night I baptized Chris and Melissa's friend, and our brother, Tommy. His time on this side of eternity is rapidly coming to a close. We wanted to hold true to the standards outlined in our *Book of Worship*, and offer him every opportunity to connect with Christ before meeting Him face-to-face.

Professing Our Faith

The Sacrament of Baptism assumes a profession of faith – that either young people, or adults make for themselves. In the case of very young children – babies – that profession of faith is made by the parents, and affirmed by the local church. The child grows in the strength and knowledge of their family's faith – and when I say "their family," I mean their whole church family. If the biological family falls off the rails – and sometimes they do – you're the safety net. You've made a commitment – a promise as the local church – to that baby, that you're going to step in and help nurture and guide them in their faith until they're able to confirm and profess their own faith in Jesus Christ. It's a weighty, responsibility-oozing sacrament, but it's wonderful!

Finally, I've said this before – it's nothing new to you – we're only baptized once. God is faithful even when we are not, and He promises to keep His covenant with us, even when we break it. But, we're invited to renew, or reaffirm, our baptismal vows

often – when someone else is baptized, and in services like today, that are designed especially for this purpose. By reaffirming our baptism, baptism becomes a living sacrament – much like the marriage covenants we make. When a husband and wife get married, they exchange vows before God, and then live out the rest of their lives carrying out those promises they’ve made to each other.

So let’s look at baptism, from a Biblical perspective, and talk about it today. If you have your Bible or a Bible app handy, turn with me to Matthew 3:13-17. I’m reading from the New International Version. **Read Matthew 3:13-17.**

Baptism of the Lord

The Scripture we just read immediately follows the introduction of John the Baptist, and a statement made by him, “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come One who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire,” (Matt. 3:11). Church, we know who he’s referring to, who came after John the Baptist – that’s Jesus Christ! Our gospel lesson opens with Matthew telling us, “Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John,” (verse 13).

Notice what we’re told next. “But John tried to deter Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?’” (verse 14). John recognizes that Jesus is the One who’s coming, who’s greater than himself. So a question we might have as we look at this passage, especially in the context of the chapter it’s a part of is this: Why did Jesus come to John to be baptized in the first place? He didn’t have any sins of which He needed to be cleansed. He didn’t need to repent, and turn back to God – He is God, after all.

“Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then John consented,” (verse 15), we’re told. Jesus gives us the answer to our question, in a round-about kind of way, as He so often does in Scripture. He’s saying that He’s come to be baptized “to fulfill all righteousness.” He’s taking the next step in God’s plan to reconcile the world to Himself. This is the beginning of the process of what Paul, the greatest missionary in Church history, was talking about when he wrote to the Philippians and said, “Who, being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a Man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:6-8).

Down in the Muddy River

The clean, flawless Jesus Christ, Son of God, went down into the filthy, muddy Jordan River. John understood that Jesus’ purpose for coming was to correct a terrible situation, and to make things right with God – so he agreed to baptize Jesus. Jesus, born in the stable of Bethlehem, left heaven, came down, and was born as the Perfect

Human. He became one of us, so that by His grace, we would be able to become more like Him. Why does He do any of this? Because of His great love for us! Look what happens next in our text.

“As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased,’” (Matt. 3:16-17). We see here all three Persons of the Godhead. God the Father speaks from heaven, God the Son comes up out of the water, and God the Holy Spirit descends like a dove and lands on the Son.

The original manuscripts of the New Testament were written in Koine Greek. It was the universal language of that day, much like English is today. The statement made by our Heavenly Father to Jesus is worth taking a second look at. He said, “This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased,” (verse 17). Some of you are parents. When do you praise your children? When they do something good, something great, right? It’s a habit I’ve fallen into myself.

Always Was, Always Will Be

We may be tempted to read this verse, and assume that God is proud of Jesus for being baptized, for taking that first step of doing His earthly mission and ministry. We may be tempted to think that God the Father is like us as parents. He’s not. He’s so much greater! We fall short all the time – I fall short all the time as a parent, and you who are parents here with me today, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but you fall short, too. The original Greek word used to express God being “well pleased,” isn’t like our “I’m proud of you,” that we so often give our kids. It’s not a “good job,” slap-on-the-back sort of thing. The original word has a timeless, never beginning, never ending connotation to it. God has always been pleased with Jesus, He is pleased with Him, and He will forever be pleased with Him.

I suspect, if we parented a little more like God – always showing and indicating our pleasure in our children, and lovingly correcting them even when they do wrong – we’d see less of the wildness and craziness that permeates our society. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was, and is, and is to come, has always been and forever will be, the apple of our Father’s eye. He calls us to follow in His footsteps. And really, that’s what baptism is all about.

Come on in... The Water’s Fine!

We are baptized to show the world that we believe in, and follow, Jesus Christ. It’s a public event showing that we are marked as His people – His body – in the world today. And He calls us to be doing all the things that we see Him do on the pages of the Bible. Healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, breathing new life into dry bones, helping the lame walk, the deaf to hear, being a voice for those who can’t speak up for

themselves, and most importantly, telling others about the great things He has done for us at the cross, the empty tomb, and right now at the right hand of God the Father.

Today we have an awesome opportunity. First off, if there's anyone here who has never been baptized before, and you want to be baptized today – why wait any longer? As they say at pool parties, “Come on in, take the plunge... The water's fine!” For the rest of us, we have the opportunity to reaffirm our faith, to renew those covenant vows we made, or that were made in our behalf at our baptism. Today we affirm once again our commitment to live as children of God, and as disciples of Jesus Christ. As we get ready to turn to that liturgy of the Church, I invite you to answer the questions that will be before you in the affirmative, not only with your lips, but with your life – not just today, but throughout the coming year.

Prayer: Father in heaven, at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan You proclaimed Him Your beloved Son and anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. Grant that all who are baptized into His name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess Him as Lord and Savior, who with You and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, One God, in glory everlasting. Amen.