

## The Baptism of our Lord—January 8, 2023

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Cyril of Alexandria (c. 376–444 AD), a famous figure in Church history, once summed up the baptism of Jesus in this way, “For Christ was not baptized as one repenting but as one cleansing sins and sanctifying the waters.” It’s a good quote as you consider the Lord’s baptism in this way and how it then, in turn, informs what it means that you are baptized into Christ. The baptism of our Lord is quite a sight. You have the heavens opening (Mark’s Gospel account has them being ripped open), the Holy Spirit descending, and a distinct voice of the Father calling out from the heavens, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Jesus is no mere prophet or great teacher. He is those things, but he is the beloved Son of God. This day in the Church Year, then, is all about who Jesus is as the Son and what this means for you as sons and daughters of God in holy baptism. You are baptized into Christ, the Beloved Son, and have all that he has done. Your Lord is God himself. Jesus, fully God and fully Man, came to the Jordan to be baptized. He was anointed as the one sent by the Father to redeem his people. He is the Prophet, Priest, and King. He is the Messiah, your Redeemer.

Jesus came and it was fitting for him to be baptized. All righteousness is fulfilled even as he himself alone is righteous. In Advent God reminded you that one of the names of Jesus is, “The Lord is our righteousness.” Jesus came and did what you are not able to do. Jesus gives what you don’t have on your own. For you to boast in the Lord, as the Epistle says, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord,” is for you to trust and find your comfort and consolation in Jesus who was baptized by John in the Jordan River for you. It’s to view your baptism as how God has delivered Christ and his salvation to you. In Holy Baptism the benefits God worked for you are that he worked the forgiveness of sins, rescued you from death and the devil, and gave you eternal salvation as the words and promises of God declare. Baptism saved you because Jesus has saved you. That’s no small thing but is the very gospel itself.

As miraculous as the baptism of your Lord was, so too, your baptism was a miracle and still is a miraculous thing in your life. When holy baptism is attacked or diminished, the Holy Trinity and his work are attacked and diminished. When baptism is held in high regard, and you cling to its promises then the Holy Trinity is extolled, and you boast in Christ who has accomplished your salvation.

Martin Chemnitz had this to say on baptism which ties in well with this Sunday as you think about what you have in your baptism. Chemnitz wrote, “Baptism is the kind of action in which, through the washing of water in the Word, God the Father, for the sake of His Son the Mediator, saves us by the application and sealing of the promise of grace, the Son sanctifies and purifies, [and] the Holy Spirit regenerates, so that by the grace of Christ, into whose death and resurrection we are baptized and whom we put on in Baptism, we who have been justified have the assurance of a good conscience before God and are heirs of eternal life. Therefore the power, work, and efficacy of Baptism is of God Himself, who works, gives, and effects such blessings not without means but through the washing of water in the Word.

Therefore, when I ask what Baptism profits, bestows, and works, it is the same as if I ask what the Father, the Son, and the Spirit work, give, and effect in Baptism and through Baptism. And Scripture speaks both ways, that God saves us through Baptism, and that Baptism saves us, but not by reason of the external washing, but because it is ‘the assurance of a good conscience toward God through the resurrection of Christ.’ For we do not have Baptism without Christ, but we are thus baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit because the whole Trinity is present in Baptism: the Father saves, the Son cleanses, the Holy Spirit regenerates, not without means, but through the washing of water in the Word.”

There’s always a temptation lurking in your hearts that wants to abuse what your baptism really is as God teaches you. The devil, the world, and your fallen flesh don’t want you to extol baptism, and especially, don’t want you to live out your baptismal life. To view your baptism rightly is to view and believe the person and work of Jesus who fulfilled all righteousness for you. To cling to your baptism, is to live in your baptism in repentance and faith. This is simply to cling to Jesus and what he has done for you as you receive the means he has appointed. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness.

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Only his life lived in perfect obedience to the law of God earns you a place in eternal life. Only he as fully God and fully Man can be the perfect sacrifice, your scapegoat, as the one who takes your sin upon himself and the sin of the world and by his death satisfies the wrath of God against sin and the punishment that is justly due it. Only he can rise from the dead because death has no dominion over the Lord of life who created all things. That's the wonderful that God teaches you today as you hear this account of the Lord's baptism, and it informs your own. You see him emerge from the waters and listen to the voice of the Father which the Holy Spirit preaches to you this very instant, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Cling to your baptism daily, then, and live it. So, what does this look like, then, for you to remember and cling to your baptism daily?

What it looks like first and foremost and from which everything else flows is what you are doing right now as you hear God's word and receive his sacrament. The baptismal life is lived out first and foremost in the divine service. The daily way this is lived is when you read God's word and study it, pray to him in all and every circumstance and turn from your sin. Living your baptism is living by the word of God and not conforming your life to things which go against it. In this way, the Christian life, is a daily dying and rising which has happened in the waters of your baptism and keeps coming back to every day. To persist in sin and refuse to read and hear God's word is to deny your baptism as giving you a new birth and a new life. It's to boast in yourself rather than humbling yourself and boasting in the Lord who has redeemed you.

So too as you go about your daily tasks and life you do so as one who has gone into the waters of baptism and is covered with Christ. You go about your daily life as a Christian in what you think, say, and do. Your baptism defines how you think and look at the world around you. And, in today's day and age this is a lot different than what your eyes see, and ears hear in the world. St. Paul brings this up at the beginning of Romans 12 when he writes, "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."

Baptism has called you out and set you apart as one who belongs to Christ and is different than the fallen world. You've been anointed as a Christian. Your life confesses in both word and deed who has called you out of sin and into the light of life. Your sin was placed upon Jesus, and you now go about your daily life as one who in holy baptism have put on Christ and is heir of God's Kingdom, which is not of this world, you are heir of eternal life. As St. Paul says in Galatians 2, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Even things like changing diapers, teaching in a classroom, working in an office, putting out fires, protecting people, working the line in a shipping factory, or anything else come back to this fact of what God has given you and who he has clothed you with in the waters of your baptism. God looks at Jesus's righteous life and that he is crucified and risen for you and say, "You are my beloved son, you are my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased." He says, "I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." What a joy is to be baptized into Christ and known as God's beloved child and as his baptized people, the Church.

Take to heart all God says to you today. God has called you his own in holy baptism and he called you to a new life. The Light of the world has come, and you are children of the light. This is all revealed to you even as Jesus is shown to be who he is in this divine Theophany, this Epiphany. Being baptized is going headlong into the wilderness that you live in around you and being a light in the darkness. It's not forgetting what God has made you to be in the waters of baptism where he forgave your sin, rescued you from death and the devil, and gave you eternal salvation. That's the armor you wear in this world and that who you are in Christ. Day by day this is what you remember as you get up in the morning and face what is before you just as you prayed about this a few minutes ago in the Collect of the Day.

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You stand up against temptation, you pray to Lord for help, guidance, and give him thanks. You make it your habit to read God's word and learn from it. You desire to live according to the Ten Commandments because you know that these things are good, and your life is lived as a living sacrifice to God and in love toward your neighbor. This is what you are to talk about with your wife, your kids, and your friends. Sit around your dinner tables, in your living rooms, and wherever reading the Bible together, praying, and singing good hymns like we are singing today. These things refine you and strengthen you as you live as baptized people of God. If you need help doing this, come talk to me, your pastor, I can help you.

This is a crucial thing in your lives, dear baptized people of God. Your hope, trust, and confidence are in the Lord and what he has given to you, and you protect what he gives. Confess and discuss these eternal things which really matter in the world especially when you look around you and there is so much sin, evil, and death at every corner. Being baptized is your whole life and very existence every day you have breath.

And when you lay down your head at night you will look back at your day and see where you have sinned against the Lord, and you are sorry and want to do better the next day. You cling to his mercy as you rest your head and know that you are God's own child in Baptism. You yearn to hear God's word again and the next opportunity you can get to take into your mouth the body and blood of Christ where he continues to give you forgiveness, life, and salvation. And then you go to sleep as one who shares in the resurrection of Jesus. You go to your sleep as you will one day go to your death as one who has been marked by Christ the crucified and who will welcome you into his eternal Kingdom and raise your body from the grave on that morning of the Last Day.

See the baptism of Jesus and know what God has given you in your own baptism. Rest in the arms of the Beloved Son of the Father in whom the Father is well pleased. His righteousness is your righteousness. See the Father say that to you in your baptism and to you know as he says the words "I forgive you all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" and as you take into your mouths the same true body and blood of Jesus who stood in the Jordan River, hung on the cross, rose from the dead, and sits at the Right hand of the Father. You are baptized into Christ and that means absolutely everything now in this life and with all his people who see the full completion of their baptisms in heaven and on the Last Day when you and they are raised to immortality and incorruption just as Jesus is risen and lives and reigns to all eternity. The Lord has done it all for you and it's all yours now and forever.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen