

The Baptism of our Lord—January 12, 2025

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

“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

The church observes and celebrates the Baptism of our Lord because baptism is not an empty, useless thing. No, far from it! It is a lavish washing of regeneration. It works the forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe the words and promises of God attached to it.

It is it any wonder, then, why holy baptism is attacked? The devil, the world, and your fallen flesh attack baptism because it is such a wonderful gift of God. Like man and woman in the garden, the church, the Holy Scriptures, and Christ himself, the devil knows where God is at work and what the Lord has given for your good, so the devil sets his crosshairs on those things which the Lord has established and done.

As Christians, God warns you to be on guard on those things and people which would seek to rob you of holy baptism and its benefits. He warns you to not fall into these errors but mark and avoid them and then go running to the waters of baptism where God has washed you clean and made you his own.

So, what are these warnings? The devil attacks baptism in cunning ways. He tries to attack baptism with a pretense of holiness or in ways which try to pit it against Christ and faith. This happens most often within the church where the devil wants baptism to be viewed as a mere symbol or something where God is not at work for you. Along with that, the world wants you to deny who God has made you to be in the waters of holy baptism. It wants you to find your identity in yourself rather than who God has created you to be in your mother’s womb and recreated you to be as a Christian in the waters of Holy Baptism.

Listen to what God says about your baptism because of the work of Christ and who God says you are as a baptized child of God. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

There’s always a temptation, then, lurking in your hearts, as well, that wants to abuse what your baptism really is as God teaches you. To view your baptism rightly is to behold 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. You hear God’s word and turn from your sin. You receive mercy and forgiveness in Christ. Really living your baptism is the very Christian faith itself. It 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. 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.”

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In a sermon from 1540 Luther preached about the Baptism of Christ that, “Jesus accepted it from John for the reason that he was entering into our stead, indeed, our person, that is, becoming a sinner for us, taking upon himself the sins which he had not committed, and wiping them out and drowning them in his holy baptism. And that he did this in accord with the will of God, the heavenly Father, who cast all our sins upon him that he might bear them and not only cleanse us from them through his baptism and make satisfaction for them on the Cross, but also clothe us in his holiness and adorn us with his innocence.

Is not this a beautiful, glorious exchange, by which Christ, who is wholly innocent and holy, not only takes upon himself another’s sin, that is, my sin and guilt, but also clothes and adorns me, who am nothing but sin, with his own innocence and purity? And then besides dies the shameful death of the Cross for the sake of my sins, through which I have deserved death and condemnation, and grants to me his righteousness, in order that I may live with him eternally in glorious and unspeakable joy. Through this blessed exchange, in which Christ changes places with us (something the heart can grasp only in faith), and through nothing else, are we freed from sin and death and given his righteousness and life as our own.”

Cling to your baptism daily, then, and live it as you walk through this world by faith in Christ and know too that you are not alone in this walk of faith. Being baptized also means you are gathered into the ark of the church. Together you are the baptized people of God. You are the city set on a hill in this midst of the fallen world. The church exists in a world that is in darkness and finds its wisdom and way of life in ways that are far from godly. Right after the baptism of Jesus he went into the wilderness and was tempted by the devil and that’s something that also is telling for us as the baptized people of God. In the Epistle reading God inspired St. Paul to write, “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”

You do well to hear those words today and take them to heart. God called you, both as individuals and together as his people, his own in holy baptism and he called you to a new life. The significance of your baptism is lived out daily. 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. 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.

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 talk about to with your wife, your kids, and your friends. Sit around your dinner tables, in your living rooms, and wherever you gather reading the Bible together, praying, and singing good hymns like you 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 your pastors, we can help you.

This is a crucial thing in your lives, dear baptized people of God. Teach this to your children and stand up for the Christian faith. Work for the bread which does not perish. 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. But as for you and your house you will serve the Lord and live as the baptized people of God not despairing but in the confidence of Christ who goes before you. Being baptized is your whole life and very existence each day you have breath.

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And when you lay down your head at night, look back at your day and see where you have sinned against the Lord and want to do better the next day. Yet as a baptized child of God, 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 go to sleep and in good cheer 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.

Dear saints of God, behold 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.