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Epiphany 1

Matthew 3:13-17

**Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.** <sup>14</sup> But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

<sup>15</sup> Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (NIV 84)

Theme: Rejoice in Christ’s baptism—and yours!

1. His baptism fulfilled all righteousness.
2. Your baptism connects you to Christ.

November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1983: that’s my birthday. When’s yours? Everyone remembers their birthday; no one has to pause and think for a second about the day of their birth—it’s a big day in our society: we celebrate, we have parties, people buy us presents; it’s a big deal to us. Here’s another date: December 4, 1983: that’s my baptism date—the day I was born again. When’s yours? If you are like most people, even Christians, you aren’t quite sure. But what is sure is what day is more important—your baptism day.

We have a tendency to downplay our baptisms; why is that? Some might say because it happened so long ago for many of us that we simply don’t remember it; but the same can be said about the date of our births. Really, it’s a product of our society—birthdays are something that we celebrate every year, but our baptisms are kind of looked at as some ceremony that our parents did to us because that is what you do. Or we may look at it as something through which God blessed us many years ago; but doesn’t matter too much for your life today. We also aren’t able to see with our eyes all the amazing blessings God gives us at baptism; it looks simply like water is poured on a head and some words are said—it may seem like an empty ritual to many. And so, we have the tendency to downplay our baptisms, not thinking about it all that much and forgetting the importance baptism plays in our daily lives.

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So what makes our baptism so great and our baptism date even more special than our birthday? All of us were born, and conceived, really, into sin. As cute as we may have been; and as innocent we may have seemed, we were anything but. We were sinners, enemies of God, and each and everything we did was a sin since it wasn’t done out of love and thanks to the Lord. And the wages of sin is death. Our birth leads to death. Because we are sinners all of us will die physically and all who don’t believe in Christ as the world’s one and only Savior will also die eternally.

That’s why we need baptism. Peter says, **baptism...now saves you also**. Paul says in Titus, **he saved through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit**. Our births lead to deaths; but our baptisms give life and salvation!

But Jesus is different. We’ve talked the last few weeks about Jesus’ conception and birth—conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus is true God and true man. And so he wasn’t conceived and born into sin like the rest of us. He is perfect and holy and he never did anything against God’s will.

This is what the people saw and heard and Jesus’ baptism. As he was coming up out of the water, heaven opened up and a dove came from heaven and landed on him—Matthew tells us that this was the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. While that would have been odd enough, a voice, then, came from heaven. It was the voice of God the Father who said, **This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased**. Everyone heard it just as they saw heaven opened and the dove that landed on Jesus. He is God’s Son! The Father was pleased with him because Jesus was perfect and holy; there was nothing wrong found in Jesus. This is the start of Jesus ministry; the Holy Spirit is given to him here to help in his ministry and to fulfill the prophecy from Isaiah. The dove and the Father’s words from heaven mark Jesus as the Promised Messiah.

So Jesus didn’t need to be baptized like we need to be baptized. Jesus had no sin that needed to be washed away, he didn’t need to be saved from death, and he was already God’s Son. And yet Jesus came to John to be baptized. But John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; Jesus didn’t need to baptize John, John should be the one getting baptized; so John objected.

But Jesus said, **it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.** What exactly does Jesus mean here? Both John and Jesus would fulfill their purpose by John baptizing Jesus. John was the forerunner of Christ; he prepared the people for his coming. John himself said when talking about Christ, **the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.** But what about Jesus? The purpose of his coming was to save us from our sins. In order to save us from our sins Jesus would have to serve as our substitute. He did so on the cross, upon which he took our sins upon himself and suffered our eternal condemnation. Jesus became a sinner for us and became guilty of everything we have done wrong. Isaiah prophesied, **he was numbered with the transgressors.** Paul said, **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.** That is why Jesus died—he didn't die for his own sins; but for ours. He needed to be baptized to wash away sins; not his sins but our sins. This was the will of the Father and by getting baptized for our sins as our substitute he fulfilled all righteousness.

And so we rejoice in Christ's baptism; but we also rejoice in our own. But what exactly is baptism? First of all, it is important to remember that baptism is not something we do for God or to show our faith by dedicating ourselves to him, it is a means of grace through which the Lord blesses and saves us. We also know that the power of baptism relies not on what we do or our faith; but on the power and promises of Christ—without which, the water would be just plain water. It may seem as if nothing happens at baptism; but when we look through the eyes of faith, we see what the truth is.

Peter said on the Day of Pentecost, **Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** And Ananias said to Paul, **What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.** Baptism gives the forgiveness of sins. In baptism our sins are washed away and the Old Adam, that is our sinful nature, is drowned. As you wash your hands to get them clean, so baptism washes away the stain of sin; we are purified, made clean by the waters of baptism.

In the words above from Peter on baptism he said that those who are baptized will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That gift of the Holy Spirit is nothing other than faith. He is the one who works faith into

our hearts and keeps us in the one true faith. He does this through the gospel in Word and Sacraments. It is in baptism that he gives us saving faith in Jesus Christ or increases the faith of those who already believe.

And it is through this saving faith that we become members of God's family. In baptism the Lord adopts us as his own. Paul says in Galatians 3, **You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.** So in baptism we are made his children, turned from unbelievers who were going to die, to believers and his heirs who will receive the gift of eternal salvation!

In baptism we put on Christ. We may be born without clothes, but at birth we are wearing garments soiled with sin—filthy garments that cannot get clean. But in Baptism we put off the sin-stained garments and clothes ourselves in Christ's righteousness. In baptism Christ's righteous perfection covers over our sinfulness and we are considered sinless in the eyes of the Lord.

Finally, our baptisms connect us to Christ and his work as Paul says in Romans 6, **don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.** Christ suffered, died, and rose from the dead for us. Our baptisms connect us to him, in our baptisms his death and resurrection are also ours. His righteous life is ours; just as he died and rose from the dead, we too will rise from the dead after we die and we will join him in heaven forever!

We have highlighted some of the many benefits the Lord gives to us through baptism: he forgives us washing away our sins, brings us to faith, and adopts us making us part of his family,. In our baptisms we are clothed with the righteous robes of Christ and we are connected to him in his death and resurrection. That is why Peter can say, **Baptism...now saves you.** So baptism can't be something we do for Christ, but something through which he blesses us—all the more reason to remember the date of our baptisms!

But all those gifts were given to us in the past; and we might then think of baptism as having no real significance for today. But that isn't accurate either—first off because the forgiveness of sins and faith is very much applicable for today and our salvation lasts forever. But

also because our baptisms can also lift us out of the pit of despair and guilt. If you are feeling guilty about some sin you have committed and the devil tries to lead you to despair—you are wondering how God could forgive you or if he could possibly love you after all the horrible things you have done, you only have to go back to your baptism. You are a baptized child of Christ, that means you are forgiven, and you are the Lord's dear children, clothed in his righteousness. He loves you and doesn't count that sin against you.

And our baptisms have another practical use for our every-day lives. Paul also says in Romans 6 when talking about baptism, **we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.** Daily we should return to our baptisms to drown the Old Adam, our sinful nature, all over again in repentance and we let our New Man rise in our hearts on a daily basis. The forgiveness of sins we receive through baptism is a reminder and motivation for living a life according to God's Word.

I was born on Monday November, 28<sup>th</sup>; but I was born again on Sunday, December 4<sup>th</sup>. It's obviously not wrong to celebrate your birthday—God has blessed you with your years on this earth and you should celebrate. But let us not forget the dates of our baptisms. For our births lead to death; but our baptisms give forgiveness and salvation! If you don't know when you were baptized look it up some time this week, remember it, and treasure that date. More important, however, than remembering the date, is remembering the blessings God gave you through baptism. You are a baptized child of God, you are forgiven, purified, and saved. You are clothed with Christ's righteousness and are his heir who will join him in heaven forever. Daily drown your sinful nature in the waters of baptism and let your new man arise. With so many blessings given by baptism, let us love and cherish our baptism for through it we are connected to Christ, our Savior who was baptized as our substitute to fulfill all righteousness. Amen.