

Sunday, January 12, 2020 – The Baptism of Our Lord
“Why Pleased?”

Matthew 3: 13-17

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Story Interrupted

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

There are events where we cannot help but take notice. Historical moments, full of such great meaning, days where you remember where you were and what you were doing when... When President Kennedy or Dr. King were killed. When Neil Armstrong took one small step for man. When the Berlin Wall fell. On 9/11. So too there are moments in our lives we'll always remember – when you were married. When your kids were born. When UNLV won the National Championship in Men's Basketball or when the Golden Knights clinched the Western Conference Finals.

There are texts in Scripture too, that draw extra special attention – and today is such a day, for it is a day where all three Persons of the Trinity show themselves in one place. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus “like a dove,” and the Father's voice rumbles from Heaven – this is my Son whom I love – with Him I am well-pleased!” The Father speaks. And it all revolves around something about this Jesus. What can it mean? Before we get to that, note well, these kind of God-sightings, theophanies we call them, don't happen every day. It is a sign to us – something very important is happening here. Stand up and pay attention!

That's what John's doing, even before the Father's voice thunders and the Holy Spirit descends. Jesus' very request to be baptized takes John's breath away. See, it's the same word, baptize that we use when we think of baptizing someone in church. It's the same general action – application of water, in order to “wash away” a person's sin. But John's baptism is not the same as yours and mine. The biggest difference? The name. We are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God washes us of our sin, not only those we've already committed but all sin for the rest of our lives. John's baptism is a baptism of repentance. It's not the sacrament you and I know, rather a ritual, a washing of sin reserved for people who've been “really bad.” Yet, Jesus stands with the masses, waiting to be baptized. To stand here before John is to take responsibility for your sin.

How shocking it must have been for John to see the one he knows is the Messiah standing among throngs of ordinary, sinful, confessing people. I wonder if he even noticed Jesus in the crowd, blended in like Waldo before his Christ-cousin stepped forward, from in between the local village drunk and the person who yelled and screamed at their family, from behind the guy who cheated on his taxes and in front of the kid who bullied his peers. These people are coming to have their sins forgiven. They're coming to confess. What could John possibly have to offer Jesus through this baptism? More than that, if this is the Messiah, wouldn't it be an outrage and insult to place him among these sinners? And how could he, John, dare to stand in a position of honor and power over He, whose sandals John was not fit to carry? John says, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?!" This is not the kind of Jesus John expects.

We may not have kings today in our country, but we do have presidents. There was a minor stir several years ago when President Obama was photographed wearing flip flops. Personally, I don't see what the big deal is – the man was at the beach buying a snocone for his daughter and besides, Nixon wore his wingtips to the beach in San Clemente and got panned for that, too, so maybe there's no way to win. Forget presidents – this is the Messiah. John has just finished telling the crowd he is unworthy of Jesus, and now Jesus blends into their midst? This isn't honor and glory. Shouts of "Make way for the king!" and kneeling as the chariot passes by – that's more like it. Waving palm branches and lying cloaks before him as is predicted of the Messiah – that's more like it. But not this.

"Let it be so now," Jesus said – it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." What righteousness? Jesus is already God and needs to do nothing to earn or prove it. for Jesus shows John, and anyone who cares to pay attention, what His ministry is all about – making us righteous. God is breaking into human history in a radical and unexpected way – to dwell among His people. Not simply to live in a palace surrounded by his serfs, but to move into the humble place next door. He comes not to prove His own holiness but to win it for everyone else. For God's Son, Israel, who ate forbidden fruit, who complained after being rescued from Egypt, whose kings and people worshipped false gods in Israel and Judah, and who continue to sin in God's Church today. He came out of Israel as a do-over for all of Israel's failures. He is a

new Adam. A new Abraham, a new Moses, a new David. He carried the righteousness of all God's people, from the Old Testament and in His Church today, on His back – all of God's people reduced to one, were not only represented but personified by this Jesus. He came not just to stand in for us, but to be us.

And being us meant taking on all the bad. To be us means to become sin. Oh no, he Himself did not sin, but being us meant taking on our sin. And so just like standing anonymously in a sinful crowd waiting to be baptized by John, Jesus again is placed in the middle of sinners. Jesus hangs on the cross between a thief and a robber, sentenced by a jealous Sanhedrin, rejected in favor of the murderer Barabbas, flogged and nailed by pagan soldiers, sentenced by a spineless Pilate. He comes out of the midst of sinners though He is not one. Comes out of their midst to experience all their brokenness, their trials, their pain. Comes out of their midst to achieve the perfection these poor sinners cannot. Comes out of their midst so He can truly be one of them, live with them, love them, and even cry out, "Father, forgive them." Comes out of their midst to die for them. He comes to be us – and our lives are no longer our own. "I no longer live," Paul tells us in Galatians, "but Christ lives in me."

My guess is any of us, much like John, would have chafed at the idea of Jesus coming to be baptized by us, or like Peter in the Upper Room, be aghast at the idea of Jesus bowing to serve us. It's not right, it's turned around – this is God and we are His servants. He deserves glory and power, not our sin. Yet, this is the plan of God. It is only after His lowly descent into the river, His humble submission on the cross, that glory is shown.

Should it be a surprise? This is a God, after all, whose power is made perfect in weakness. We, like John might not expect this kind of king, so selfless, so... inappropriate to the honor and glory, the glitz and glam expected of the greatest man alive. But it is in obedience, and in humbleness to the Father's plan that the greatest glory imaginable will be won. Jesus, hanging in the place of sinners will bring down the world and its' prince. Only then, after accomplishing that great mission, will he act the King we expect Him to be.

What kind of Jesus do we expect – the Jesus who is full of glitz and glam or something else? What's more impressive? A Biblical event like Father, Son and Holy Spirit showing themselves in one place like at Jesus' baptism, or God coming right to us through Jesus' body

and blood, every week? What's more impressive? Thousands of people gathered in worship with perfect lights and sound, effects and choreography? Or God's Word preached and forgiveness given? What's more impressive – recognition and fame, or the Holy Spirit working through our most insignificant actions each and every day, things that may go completely unnoticed by others but are used powerfully by God as His hands and feet in this world?

God shows Himself to us in the ordinary, the everyday – because God doesn't limit us to seeing His miracles in our life once in a lifetime or some time way long ago in Scripture, but in our daily lives right now – so regularly in fact that it may even lose its shocking effect on us, and that we take God's work among us for granted!

God's power continues to be shown through weakness. But more comforting is this: Jesus alive and well even if our lives feel turned upside down. God's love and acceptance for you and me doesn't depend on how we think we're doing and doesn't depart when we fail – for Jesus has become us. Christ lives in us, and with Him, the Father is well-pleased. Amen.