

Sunday, January 9, 2022 – Baptism of our Lord
“Well Pleased”

Luke 3: 15-22

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

One of the great things about Christmas is the excitement it generates especially over certain gifts that captured your heart and imagination. For young children that seems a little easier. Maybe it was a new electric scooter with a helmet, elbow pads, kneepads and wrist guards. They went on the moment the presents were all opened. You could hardly get them off at bedtime. And they were the first things back on again in the morning and stayed on all day. I suspect there are some bigger boys with more expensive toys that were the same way. Old or young they can't wait to show you what they got. Mom, watch me. Dad, will you go outside with me. Look what I can do.

God is very excited about the gift he gave you at Christmas. To us a child is born, to us a Son is given. Today, in the city of David a Savior has been born to you who is Christ the Lord. The little season of Epiphany is upon us. For the seven weeks it is God the giver of gift who's saying, "Look at this. See what he can do. Check this out. You're not going to believe this, watch."

It actually started Thursday. January 6th is the day of Epiphany that marks the arrival of the wise men to worship the young child and offer their gifts. But today it is the Baptism of Jesus complete with the voice from heaven saying, "You are my Son, Whom I love, with You I am well-pleased." You'll hear that same line again on the last Sunday of Epiphany when we celebrate the Transfiguration of Jesus. On the mountain with three of His disciples His appearance changes, He is transfigured, and the light is so bright the disciples can't bear to look at Him. And again the voice from heaven, "This is my Son, whom I love, with Him I am well-pleased."

On a side note the church year is a handy little memory tool designed and used for centuries to help believers remember the miraculous plan of God's salvation. Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent,

Easter, Pentecost. The whole year broken up into six little seasons to help you build and shape your everyday existence around the life and times of Jesus and His Church.

The whole church year shouts – Here is your God who saves you. In marketing you might call Epiphany the teaser season. Little glimpses and sneak peeks of the true identity of this man Jesus from Nazareth all leading up to the grand finale at Good Friday and Easter.

The first glimpse comes today in is His baptism which to be honest is a little confusing. The immediate question is “why did Jesus have to be baptized?” You’re not alone. John the Baptist, the one out in the wilderness preparing the way for the coming of Jesus had the same difficulty. Matthew reports that when Jesus presented Himself for baptism John said, “I need to be baptized by you. Why do you come to me?” To which Jesus replied rather cryptically, “Let it be so for now in order to fulfill all righteousness.”

One thing is for sure this baptism was not for him. Baptism works the forgiveness of sins of which Jesus had none to be forgiven. It is interesting that baptism is not mentioned again during Jesus earthly ministry. Not until three years later, after He is crucified, dead, buried, and risen again, not until just before he ascends back into heaven does Jesus unlock the secret of His baptism when he says to His disciples, “Now, go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

His baptism wasn’t for Himself it was for you and for me, and for every generation since Jesus ascended back into heaven until he comes again. Something incredible is happening. It is Epiphany. God is saying, “Watch this, look what’s happening.”

Jesus puts Himself into baptism so that centuries later you and I can meet Him there. That is the testimony of the remainder of the New Testament. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says in Romans 6:

“Or 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.”:

Jesus puts Himself into baptism so that centuries later you and I can meet Him there. He connected Himself to the water so that now, by the work and power of the Holy Spirit, we receive Him in our baptism. That is the testimony of the rest of the New Testament. Listen again to the Apostle Paul in Galatians: “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.”

And all of sudden, Epiphany, your baptism becomes something remarkable and powerful. Not just a silly little religious ceremony that your parents did when you were a baby or some noble act on your part to show God you've accepted Him. Suddenly baptism becomes a point of contact between heaven earth, between you and your Savior. His perfect life, His suffering and death, His resurrection miraculously connected to the water. Your separation from God, your sinful human nature, your inability to believe and trust and obey is exchanged with Jesus in your baptism.

This is Epiphany God showing Himself to you. Touching you through baptism He washes you, He drowns that rebellious instinct, He buries your sin with Jesus in the tomb and He raises you up to live a new life by faith.

Baptism is the most underused and overlooked gift that God has given us. It is there for you everyday. Do you suppose it was an accident that God chose the most common substance on the surface of the planet to bring us into contact with Jesus? Do you suppose it is just a coincidence that water is absolutely essential to human life, that without it we soon die? Do you think that maybe God had in mind that every time we saw water, drank it, washed in it, that it might remind us of the miracle that happened in the water of our baptism, the great exchange of our sin for the righteousness of Jesus?

There is always a strange mixture of optimism and pessimism this time of year - optimism about fresh starts and new beginnings and doing some things differently this year - pessimism about the all too real fact of life that we've tried before to make and keep our resolutions for change and failed.

John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, who lived 1647-1680 once said, "Before I was married I had three theories about raising children. Now I have three children and no theories." Maybe you know how he feels. Not just as a parent but as a believer in Jesus Christ. I know how it is supposed to work. I teach it, proclaim it from this pulpit, counsel others about it, and pray for it, but reality has a way of robbing me of any confidence and sometimes even the joy of being alive and belonging to God.

But then He comes again to say "remember what happened in your baptism? I took your failure and gave you Jesus' success. You don't have to conjure up the power to change from inside yourself. You've been connected to Jesus. His life, His death, His resurrection they're all yours, new every morning. I forgive you. Here is new life. Take hold of it and give it your all today and tomorrow we will do it all again.

God is so excited about His Christmas present to you He can't wait for you to start using it! In Jesus' name, amen.