

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is the feast day that we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. This worship today not only signifies the end of the Christmas season, it more significantly marks the beginning of the ministry of Jesus and confirms the identity of Jesus as the Son of God.

From our appointed Gospel lesson from Luke we hear that the heavens were opened, NOT as Jesus was coming up out of the water, but as Jesus was praying after he was Baptized. In that moment, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descended upon Jesus and we hear a voice, it does NOT say who the voice is but we can safely assume that its God's voice, nonetheless we hear:

"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

In this succinct passage, we have the voice confirming the revelation of God in human form...Jesus Christ. And in this worship today we also celebrate and learn the confirmed Christian identity of Mason Kahler, a Baptized child of God, a forgiven sinner who through faith lives in the grace given to him through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And as we celebrate, give thanks, and confirm the faith poured out upon Mason at his Baptism, I am especially grateful that we are able to celebrate this blessed event on this particular day when we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord.

I say this because this is not just a day to celebrate and affirm Mason's Baptism, it is a day to celebrate and reflect upon our own Baptism and what that Baptism means for each one of us. It is a worship that evokes this question in us all...who are Baptized Christians...what does this mean?

When I ask this, I am asking in light of this Gospel lesson appointed for today from Luke. Moreover, I am not asking about the physicality of Baptism, I am asking us to look at how Baptism works now, today, as we go about our lives away from this gathering...how does Baptism identify us and how is this Baptismal identity manifest in the everyday mundane routines of our lives? Does Baptism simply punch our ticket into heaven...does Baptism simply mean we are good to go?¹ I am asking us to really think about our Baptism because this is what I believe the writers of this Gospel intended this Gospel lesson to evoke in each of us. The particulars that Luke incorporates into this account of the Baptism of Jesus, I believe, evokes a deeper understanding as well as a richer heartfelt gratitude of the grace and love poured out upon each of us by God.

Last week I stressed how we read into certain passages with our sentimentality and in turn our sentimentality allows ourselves to believe something that just is not in the text. In the appointed Gospel lesson for last week we heard about the wise men at the birth of Jesus and I stressed how we learn of their visit from the Gospel of Matthew but we view it through the lens of Luke's Gospel because we like the cozy setting of the Nativity in Luke. Now today in this Baptism of Jesus we do the very opposite. Today we hear Luke's account of the Baptism of Jesus but we view it, define it, and understand it through the account of Matthew. Listen to Matthew's account of the Baptism of Jesus but as I read Matthew's account follow along with Luke's account that is in your lesson insert and notice the differences:

¹ I thank Jim Dierolf for the image of our Baptism as a punched ticket. This image came up from our Tuesday morning Bible Study on January 7, 2025 when discussing this Gospel text.

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.’ Then he (John) consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’ (Matthew 3:13-17)

As you may see it is very similar, *however*, however, there are a few details that are obviously and blatantly different and for me, these differences place the intent on Baptism itself and not who is doing it or receiving it. I believe that with these differences, Luke is asking us to consider what our Baptism really means.

As we read our appointed Gospel lesson from the insert today from Luke...I ask you all...who Baptized Jesus? I asked the same thing at our Tuesday morning Bible study and they answered as I am fairly certain you all would answer...John or John the Baptist. But our Gospel today says nothing about John Baptizing Jesus. I want you to also notice that there are three verses missing from our appointed Gospel today...let me read them to you as you continue to consider John Baptizing Jesus.

¹⁸ So, with many other exhortations, [John] proclaimed the good news to the people. ¹⁹ But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by [John] because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰ added to them all by shutting up John in prison...*by shutting up John in prison.* (Luke 3:18-20)

John is in prison when Jesus is Baptized according to Luke. Luke takes the focus off the physicality or the workings of Baptism and focuses more on the meaning or the manifestation of Baptism. Luke also says this:

²¹Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying....

Who Baptized the “others”...rather who were the others who were Baptized with Jesus? Here is another detail that Luke stirs up questions with, the people who were at this Baptismal site...there are no people in any of the other Gospel accounts...only Luke tells of the people. So, what does this mean then for us today? I believe it ought to cause us to think deeper about Baptism, think past a one-time event, think past the water and the Word and seek a deeper understanding of what it truly is and how it plays out in our reaction to it.

St John Chrysostom, (c. 347 – 14 September 407) was an important Early Church Father who served as Archbishop of Constantinople in the 5th Century. He is known for his preaching and his denunciation of abuse of authority by both ecclesiastical and political leaders. Along with Cappadocian Fathers, who were a group of Byzantine Christian bishops, theologians and monks, together helped shape both the liturgy as we know it today as well as early Christianity. Chrysostom says this in his Baptism Instructions:

What happened in the case of our Master’s body (the body of Jesus) also happened in the case of your own. ...it was the divine word that led his body down into the streams of

Jordan and Baptized Him. The Master's body was Baptized by the Word, by the voice of his Father from heaven which said, "This is my beloved Son," and by the manifestation of the Holy Spirit which descended upon Him. This also happens in the case of your body. The Baptism is given in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, John the Baptist told us, for our instruction, that man does not Baptize us but God: "There comes after me one who is mightier than I, and I am not worthy to lose the strap of his sandal. He will Baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."²

St. John Chrysostom is stressing that Baptism is *NOT about who* Baptizes or where, his focus is on the work of those whose names are invoked, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In a sense, the writers of Luke, along with Chrysostom are saying to us today, yes, pastor so and so has Baptized you through the water and the Word of God...you have the assurance of forgiveness and grace, and yes, your ticket into the kingdom is punched, but look at the people around you, now what...what do you do amongst those people?

Having the people in the passage tells us that Baptism does not happen in a vacuum, it is a public act that invites all to participate, likewise, it is an act that we participate in as it is manifest in our everyday lives as we live our lives among people. The voice of the Lord says to us, the people gathered around Jesus today, through the prophet Isaiah:

...you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, (Isaiah 43:4)

And from the waters of our Baptism, we are sent in that love amongst people to be and to share that love of God. In here today, in this joyous gathering we all seem to know this and even profess to know God, but as we go about our lives, amongst the people in the world, we deny God by our actions.³ I think we deny God with our false sense of self-righteousness that we believe we have earned and that the others cannot or have not earned it like we have. We believe we earn grace but those we dislike earn judgment and condemnation.

Today we learn through the act of Baptism Jesus is the Son of God. And this Baptism happens amidst the people. And of course, as the Gospel continues, we see how that Baptism is manifest in the life of Jesus through his encounters with people. In Baptism, we too are identified as a child of God in the same way that Jesus is. And because of this baptism, I began this sermon by asking, NOT how Baptism identifies ME, rather how is our Baptismal identity manifest in the everyday mundane routines of our lives?

The voice of John the Baptist's father, Zachariah tells us how our Baptism ought to be manifested:

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called (a prophet)

~~the prophet of the Most High;~~

for you will go before the Lord

to prepare his ways,

⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to (all) his people by the forgiveness of their sins.

⁷⁸ By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,

² Joel C. Elowsky, Editor, Thomas C. Oden, General Editor. *Ancient Christian Commentary of Scripture, New Testament III, Luke*. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2007. Section, "Jesus Baptizes Christians with the Holy Spirit and Fire." Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions." Page 64.

³ Titus 1:16 NRSV

⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.’ (Luke 1:76-79)

Our Baptism is made manifest when the grace given in the waters of that Baptism is extended and shared freely with more and more people to increase thanksgiving to the glory of God.

Luther reminds us that no greater jewel can adorn our body and soul than baptism, for through it we become completely holy and blessed, which no other kind of life and no work on earth can acquire.⁴ This is the greatest jewel that can adorn our body but may those who look upon it come to see the manifestation of that beauty, that grace, and that meaning of new life that comes from Jesus Christ himself and not the one who wears it.

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

⁴ Kolb, Robert ; Wengert, Timothy J. ; Arand, Charles P.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000. “The Large Catechism” The Fourth Part: Concerning Baptism, page 462, par45.