

The Baptism of our Lord  
Rev. Timothy C. Linstrom  
Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit, Lincolnshire, Illinois

January 12, 2020

The season of Christmas is over, and our gospel lesson follows the wonderful story of Jesus lowly birth with the story of Jesus baptism. We make the birth of Christ a very important and special event, but only two books of the Bible give us the Christmas story, Matthew and Luke. But there are at least six books that talk about Jesus' baptism – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, and Romans. In scriptures it would seem that Jesus' baptism is a more important event than his birth. Perhaps that should be a clue for us that we should not only give greater emphasis to Jesus' baptism, but to our own baptisms as well.

With a show of hands, first I want everyone to raise their hand if they know their birth day.....now I want everyone to raise their hand if they know the day they were baptized. The gospel put more emphasis on baptism than birth, so perhaps we should too. If you don't know the exact day, then choose any day, in fact choose every day....because Baptism is a place where God does something to us.

Whenever this day to celebrate baptism comes about, I am reminded of a January many years ago when I was in Gary, Indiana to preside at worship at Bethel Lutheran Church, but I was also given the honor of baptizing the seven children of my nephew Salvador and his wife Leena. Seven baptisms in one day are still a record for me, and it was a special day for me, and for the family, and especially for those 7 children..... for they were received into the family of God, adopted by God to be heirs of the kingdom of God, and they were promised that the Holy Spirit would be within them, that God would always be with them, that God would never leave them. And they were promised that all their sins would be forgiven both past and yet to come, and they were promised that when their life's journey came to an end, they would join their Lord and Savior Jesus and have life everlasting. What a wonderful day it was. Salvador, Anthony, Celeste, Saleena, Sergio, Priscilla, and Gabriela became heirs to the kingdom of God, children not of this world, but children of God.

And it was remarkable to see Maria's family respond to the wonder of the moment. The next-to-the-youngest child, Priscilla, was the most difficult child in the family. She would never want to leave her Mother, and would have a tantrum if anyone else tried to touch her or hold her. Even as we were about to baptize her she was pretty resistant. But afterwards, at the family celebration, this little girl was like no one had seen her before. She played with her uncle who previously could never get near her, she went from person to person with relative ease, and this was in an overcrowded house where with so many gathered, it was hard for any of us to get any breathing room. And over and over I heard people notice a change in this young girl and everyone seemed to agree that it was the Holy Water of baptism that had transformed her.

Now who's to say what caused little Priscilla's behavior to dramatically change that day, or what caused her to be willing to be more social with others...But it made me stop and

consider whether we still have that sense of wonder about the water's of our baptism.....or whether we have a belief in the power of our baptism.

In our text for today from Luke, Jesus is baptized, and many have asked why would Jesus have to be baptized, he was without sin, and God was obviously already with him for he is the Son of God. So Jesus' baptism must not be about the qualifications of the one being baptized, whether they are without sin like Jesus, or whether they have an understanding about their faith or about baptism. Jesus' baptism is really not so much about Jesus, but about what God is doing. And in our own baptism, it's also about what God is doing on our behalf.

Peter said about Jesus' baptism, that "God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power." So in being baptized Jesus was indicating to us where the source of power was in his life, and where the orientation of his whole being lies. Jesus' power comes from God. Jesus' baptism points to God.

You know in the many accounts scripture tells us of Jesus, Jesus always has this unusual power about him, whenever he was confronted by demons he stood up to the challenge, or when people rejected him and wanted to do him harm, he was able to simply walk through the crowds and divert the danger. Jesus had the power to face any challenge, and that same power is with us as well. We too are filled with the Holy Spirit, the same spirit that filled Jesus, gives us the power and gentleness to meet all our daily challenges. To face the challenges we are going through right now, the challenges that can be so frustrating that they may be driving us crazy, the challenges that leave us overwhelmed because we have no answers. When the Spirit is inside us and in the people around us, we have the power to stand up against any foe whether it be physical, emotional or spiritual. In the waters of our baptism there is power, spiritual power, spiritual gentleness, the power we need to get us through the day.

It gives us:

The power to continue to love in a world filled with hate

The power to continue to work for peace in a world addicted to violence.

The power to continue to believe in good in a world that is filled with so much suffering and pain.

The power to continue to believe that ultimately God's kingdom will come and God's will, will be done in all of creation

The power to continue to be a disciple of Jesus in this world.

Jesus' baptism is a story of power, and perhaps the greatest power comes from the simple words of God's loving blessing on Jesus. For God says, "You are my son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased."

Isn't it interesting that God is already "well-pleased" with Jesus, and yet Jesus hasn't done anything yet. In fact, it is in the verse that follows God's pleasure with Jesus that

we are told that Jesus begins his work. So God was pleased with Jesus before he began his public ministry.

In the waters of our baptism, God also shows his positive regard toward us. Even before we can do anything to receive God's praise, God loves us, is pleased with us, and has confidence that we can live up to what God has already declared us to be.

In Jesus' baptism, God is affirming a special relationship with Jesus and uses words that express the closest kind of family and emotional bond. Jesus "is my son" he is "the Beloved", and he is the one with whom God is "well-pleased". With these words God's confirms a special relationship with Jesus, and God expresses confidence in him. But with that relationship goes responsibility, for the relationship of father to son implies obedience, and the gift of the Spirit implies mission. God's confidence in Jesus, binds God's cause to Jesus, who is now responsible for it. Jesus must respond to God's trust by doing God's will.

Matthew isn't telling us about Jesus' baptism just to inform us about what happened to Jesus. He relates this story to also indicate something about our baptisms, our need to be in prayer, our anointing with the Spirit, and our subsequent battles with evil and ministry in the world. We have a "beloved" and "well-pleasing" relationship with God. And with that comes the responsibility to live out that relationship – to fulfill the mission God sends before us – to live up to the confidence God has placed on us. Jesus' baptism begins his ministry to the world, as our baptism does as well.

As we leave this sanctuary, this holy place, we are cleansed by the waters of baptism to new life. We are given power and gentleness to carry out our mission in this world. And we are reminded that we are children of God, children that God is so proud of and so pleased with.

What a great way to start the new year, what a great way to start a new life!