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Matthew 3:13-17; Romans 6:1-11  
“The Baptism of Jesus and Our Baptism”  
Year A – The Baptism of Our Lord  
January 12, 2020

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

My goal today is fairly simple, and here’s what it is upfront. My goal is to have you leave here today more fully appreciating two things: 1) the importance and necessity of Jesus’ baptism, and 2) the importance and necessity of your own baptism.

First, Jesus. Today, we celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord on this first Sunday after the Epiphany. And that’s what we heard in our Gospel Reading. Jesus begins his earthly ministry by coming to the Jordan River, where John the Baptist has been preaching and baptizing for the repentance of sin. You may know this story well, especially what happens next. When Jesus comes out of the water, the full Trinity makes an appearance. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove, anointing him for his work to come. And the voice of the Father speaks from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17).

But what may not be as clear in all this is the reason *why* Jesus was baptized. It’s not like he wasn’t already God. He’s the Son of God from eternity. And it’s not like Jesus was in need of a baptism of repentance, the kind that John was offering. Jesus was perfect and sinless. Even John was confused at why Jesus was there. Matthew writes, “John would have prevented him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’” (3:14) John knew his purpose was to prepare the way for the Lord. He was the guy before the guy. He knew the time had come for him to decrease so that Jesus could increase (John 3:30). If anything, John wanted a baptism from Jesus.

But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). In other words, Jesus is saying, “I know, John. Technically, you’re right. But let’s do this anyway, because I’m here to do something much greater. I’m here to achieve all perfection and righteousness for the sake of every person in the world, and it begins right here, in this very moment.” And so John baptized him.

But John was right. Jesus didn’t need baptism. So, *why* was he baptized? Well, in my preparation this week, I heard one person put it this way, which I thought was very profound. We often wonder at why Jesus was baptized, which he didn’t need as the Son of God. And yet this is the same Jesus who willingly died a death he didn’t deserve on the cross. Which shows us this: whether it was his baptism, or his death, or anything else in between, Jesus wasn’t there for himself. He was there for others. He was there for us.

The reason Jesus was baptized was for us. Because at his baptism, Jesus began his mission of taking the place of sinners. In his baptism, the spotless Lamb of God began to take a place he did not deserve, but a place he took willingly. This was a baptism for sinners, and Jesus was standing in the sinner’s place. And he didn’t stop there. Jesus’ baptism carried him for three years all the way to the cross, where again, Jesus took the place of sinners. Not because he was one, but because he was offering himself on our behalf. And on the cross, Jesus died, suffering the punishment sinful people like you and me rightfully deserved.

Now, to be honest, knowing that we have a Savior who has done this for us, the temptation is to take all this for granted, to *not* take our sin and its consequences seriously, to not

think about Jesus taking our place, because we assume we don't have to. I mean, factually, I think we understand it, and on a day like today, I think theologically we can comprehend it. But do we, in the moments of our everyday lives, truly understand the gravity of what sin is, and why we needed a Savior in the first place?

Remember, sin is that which is contrary to God's will, contrary to God himself. Sin didn't exist when God created a perfect universe for us. We walked with him, and we walked with each other, and it was perfect. No sin, no effects of sin, no shame, no disease, no death. But then we chose to oppose God. We chose to pursue that which looked good in our eyes, but was actually nothing but death and evil.

And his world was changed that day, down to its core, when Adam and Eve fell into sin. All of creation was affected. Sin has such far-reaching effects in this world, that we can't even fathom what life would be like without it. What it would be like to have a relationship with someone that isn't tainted by sin? What it would be like to live in God's perfect creation that isn't suffering under the effects of sin? What it would be like to live with God without sin? We're just so used to it now, we can't even know.

But the fall into sin wasn't a one-time event. The fall is still current. Sin is in our very nature. And sin is still an on-going and ever-present thing. And every time *you* knowingly, or even unknowingly sin, you participate in that on-going destruction of God's creation, the end of the life God created for you. And you make yourself to be an enemy of God. Sin has such gravity that it takes you away from God and sets you opposite of him, hostile to him, thumbing your nose at the God who made you. There is no sin that is "little" or "inconsequential." There is no sin that is "excusable" or "no big deal." Because there is no sin that doesn't have the weight of eternal death attached to it.

But what can be the most tragic thing about sin, is that as appealing as your sin may seem to you in the moment, or as far ahead as you think you're getting and that's why you do it, in the end the true victim of your sin is *you*. Think about it. When you sin, let's say get angry and harbor resentment against someone who wrongs you, what does that actually do for your own well-being? It ruins your relationship, it weighs you down, and you suffer the negativity of your own sin. But what's even more, if you're getting angry and harboring resentment, then you're choosing to participate in a world already steeped in anger and resentment, and before you know it, you're part of this vicious cycle of sin that keeps this world broken and dysfunctional and dying and set against God.

We may feel appalled sometimes at the evil that comes our way, feeling blindsided when someone else sins against us, or when we see the way this world treats us, or the bad breaks we get in life that make things miserable, even though we're doing everything in our power to go the other way, or the way this creation is so dangerous to our mortal life, or the way our health and our body fail us, and we see that from the moment we're born, we're actually decaying and dying. We are so aware of all these things, and yet, we often fail to connect them to our own participation in these cycles of sin. And so we stand there wondering how all this could be happening to us.

Now, I'm not saying that when something bad happens, it's God's way of punishing you for something specific you did wrong. But what I am saying is sometimes we act so naïve and innocent to a sinful world that is opposed to God, when that's exactly what *we* are by nature, sinful and opposed to God. It's like a person who smokes, drinks, eats poorly, and never exercises, and then not only are they critical of others for doing the same thing, but they also are surprised when they end up in a health crisis later in life. *We* are sinners who, by our very nature,

and by our very thoughts, words, and deeds, fully participate in the sin of this world. What else, then, should we expect but to rightly suffer the consequences of who we are and what we do?

And that's the point I'm trying to get across, that we need to more seriously consider the gravity of our condition, our sinful condition. Because... unless we do, we cannot fully understand what it is that Jesus has done for us. Jesus went to the Jordan River, and said, "Today is the day when I will begin to take the place of sinful people like you. You have utterly destroyed the life God has given you, and you have set yourself up as his enemy. You deserve nothing but condemnation. But instead, I will begin to show you mercy. I am choosing to take your place willingly, so that you may know God's grace."

And that's what he did. He didn't have to do it. We don't deserve it. But he chose to do this for us. And his baptism carried him all the way to the cross. His baptism and the cross are linked, because on the cross, Jesus finished what began at his baptism. They're like two bookends at either end of his ministry. At the cross, Jesus received all the consequences of the sin that he did not commit, the judgment, the condemnation, and the damnation your sins deserved. Jesus took the place of sinners, the place of death. Death is the consequence for sin. Death is the only payment sin deserves. Death of our bodies, but also death of our souls for eternity. And that's what Jesus took upon himself for us.

But what happened next? Yes, Jesus was baptized to begin his mission of taking the place of sinners, and yes he died for you and suffered what you deserved. But then what? Well, this is where the importance and necessity of your own baptism comes in. Your baptism is when God, who sent his Son to take your place and die for you, connected you individually to everything that Jesus did for you.

Do you know what actually happened to you on the day you were baptized? Whether you were an infant or a child or an adult, God did something to you in your baptism. Our Epistle Reading tells us what it is, from Romans chapter 6: "Do you not know that all us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death" (6:3-4). On the day you were baptized, God *killed* you and *buried* you. Or to be more precise, he killed your sinful self, the same way he killed the sin that Jesus became on the cross. Sin requires death. The death of God's Son, and when you were baptized, your death, too. Because unless the old is crucified and buried, the new cannot be raised.

And that's the good news, that Jesus did not stay dead. Sin was paid for, but then he was raised to life. And after *you* were killed in your baptism, after *your* old nature was overcome by the mercy of the Almighty God, he drew you out of that water as a new creation, just as Jesus walked out of that tomb to new life. "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (6:4-5).

Jesus was baptized and crucified in the place of sinners, so that he could overcome everything opposed to the life God created. And then, Jesus was raised so that he could restore that life again. And in your baptism, you were personally and powerfully connected to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. You were killed but then made alive, so that you may now live. You have life in Christ today, and you also have the promise of eternal, perfect life with God to come. And this isn't theoretical. This is the true life that is really yours through baptism.

As many of you know, I spent this past week with my parents to help them through a difficult time that they're going through as my dad's health is failing. His brain cancer has already stolen so much from him, and as a family, we're grieving that. And one day that the Lord

only knows, it will also steal his earthly life, and we'll grieve that, too. But this cancer is only a symptom of the disease that's actually killing him. It's the disease of sin that's killing all of us, as well. My father's sin, my sin, your sin, this world's sin, it perverts and destroys the perfect life that God created for us. And all of us, I know, can see the ways sin is manifesting itself in our lives, whether it's in our health, or losing people we love, or how hard life is, or how broken relationships can be. How sin is relentlessly destroying your life and the life of those around you.

But God does something about it. He kills the thing that is killing you. My dad was killed by God sixty-three years ago in his baptism and raised back to life. His sin and all that would have kept him separated from God, and opposed to his Savior for eternity, was destroyed in those waters and he was raised to new life, the life of faith my dad has lived by God's grace for sixty-three years, and lives even now. And although the day will come when cancer will take his life temporarily, the day is coming when the power of God given to my dad in his baptism will be fully realized. Because he, and all Christians who have been given the promise of the resurrection through baptism, including you and me, will be raised from the dead on the Last Day and be given a perfect life, a resurrected body, free from sin and all of its effects.

"For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." That resurrection day is coming. We cannot even fathom what life will be like without the effects of sin. But it's coming, and we will see it one day, and know it. And that's the certain hope that is always there for us because of Jesus. That's the hope that my mom and dad and my family always speak to one other when we're together. That's the hope that you have. That's the importance and the significance of your baptism.

Something dramatic and wonderful happened the day you were baptized. You were personally crucified with Christ. Your sinfulness was killed by the one who was killed for you, and you were raised to a new life, and given the promise of a resurrected life that every day is one day closer. Your baptism is not just a past event, something to forget about. Your baptism is a thing of the future, because it points you forward to your life to come in the new heavens and the new earth. The day when you will know life, true resurrected life, the way that God designed it to be.

I had two goals today: to talk about Jesus' baptism and your baptism. Jesus was baptized for you, and you are baptized into Jesus, his death, his resurrection, and his eternal life. In his name. **Amen.**

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**