

“I HAVE COME TO DO IT ALL”

Message for the “*Baptism Of Our Lord*” Sunday

From Pastor Norman Staker

January 11, 2025

ISAIAH 42: 1-9 ** ACTS 10: 34-43 ** MATTHEW 3: 13-17

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. AMEN. HE IS RISEN; HE IS RISEN INDEED!!

 A little girl wanted to get baptized but her mother wanted her to attend some classes to make sure she knew what she was committing herself to. After one of the classes, her mother asked, "Honey, what does baptism mean?"

Thinking hard, the little girl said, "Well, it isn't the water that makes you clean," she began. The mother thought, "Yes, she understands."

Then smiling brightly, her daughter quickly added, "it's the soap!"

Obviously, that little girl didn't understand what baptism meant.

Does anybody here know what baptism means? I asked the congregation at Bethel several years ago what they knew of baptism. They cited salvation, forgiveness, gift of the Holy Spirit, clothing ourselves with Christ, death/burial and resurrection.

Now, all those things are true. But here in Matthew 3, we have this odd story about baptism. John the Baptist, or Baptizer, had been down at the Jordan River baptizing people for the forgiveness of sins. He was on his mission for God.

Isaiah had declared that John was to be "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.' John was sent to prepare the way for Jesus. He was to prepare people's hearts for Christ's ministry.

And how did he do that? He was telling people: "Ya'll are sinners."

He told people they'd all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Our text today begins: "Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me? But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness."

Author Herman Wouk observed not long ago that some people think that all the equipment you need to discuss religion is a mouth. But in order to gain insight into the Word of God, we must have open hearts; we must have God's Word before us; and we must be willing to act on the plain truth.

I wonder if your attitude or mine might be like a group of sightseers I heard about who were visiting a Southern battlefield and they listened stoically to the comments of their guide with his deep Southern accent. "Here," he said, "On this hallowed ground a handful of our Southern boys routed 30,000 Yanks. Here one fine battalion from Georgia annihilated a great corps of Army troops. There, in that place, two brave Virginia boys captured an entire regiment of Northerners." Finally one woman in the party spoke up with an unmistakable New England twang, "Well, didn't the North ever win a single victory," she asked? "No ma'am," said the guide finally, "and they never will as long as I'm driving this bus."

Now when it comes to the subject of baptism there must be some scriptural grounds; there must be a foundation which we can lay. It is important to understand what God's Word says about baptism.

If baptism was important to Jesus, if God's Word gives reference to it, and asks it of us, then it must be important and we need to find what God's Word says about it.

One of the unsung beauties of Jesus is the way in which He had to deal with complaints. You'd think nobody could find anything to complain about how a holy God does something, but people always think they know better. The teachers of the law didn't like how Jesus was eating and drinking with sinners and tax collectors. It didn't seem appropriate to them. Peter didn't like it when Jesus was talking about being betrayed and handed over to death. In today's text, John didn't like the idea of Jesus being baptized. It didn't seem right to him. That's something that sinners do in repentance and a need for forgiveness. It's not something the holy Son of God should be doing. So he tried to stop Jesus from being baptized. Earlier he had stopped the Pharisees from being baptized because they didn't even

think they needed it. Here he tried to stop Jesus from being baptized because He actually didn't need it. It wasn't necessary for Him.

But Jesus said that it was necessary. Jesus had a deeper reason for baptism than what John was realizing or maybe even could realize. Why? Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus wasn't entering into the Jordan so that HE could be righteous or receive forgiveness. He was entering into the Jordan to fulfill ALL righteousness. So Jesus was being baptized in order to save the world, to provide righteousness for the world, for everyone who ever lived or who ever would live. He was doing it for us.

What could I compare this to? It's like when an athlete or high profile coach signs a contract, and they show up for their first press conference at the building. There is plenty of work that goes on before that date, but then it becomes official. The difference is that theirs is a TEAM game. When Jesus enters into the water, it's a HE game. He's going to do it all, for the world.

So if He's going to do this for the world, then He is, in effect, going to have to become every sinner. Or you could say that He's going to be treated as the only sinner. God in the flesh, in the water, into sin, coming to save us. Jesus has to enter the water, for us.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. When Noah sent out the dove from the ark, he was waiting to see if there were trees and vegetation starting to grow. When it returned with an olive branch, Noah could tell that life was starting to come back. It was a sign of peace. The deluge was over. A whole new world lay before him. So also, as the Holy Spirit landed on Jesus, the deluge of God's wrath would soon be over. The world of sinners was about to embark into a new place of forgiveness and grace and salvation, through Jesus, finished and done. No more promises. Now it's reality. Jesus would not go on this journey alone. The Holy Spirit would be with Him, guide Him and strengthen Him along the way to open the pathway to heaven.

This was no mere symbolic ritual, that is clear. IN our epistle lesson from Acts for today, Peter mentions that Jesus was "anointed with the Holy Spirit and with POWER, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." A similar thing happened to David when he was anointed to be King. 1 Samuel 16:13 says, "Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on

the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power.” But didn’t Jesus already have power? Wasn’t He already united with the Holy Spirit? Yes. But living in His humility, He put Himself under the same avenues that we go through, and that included subjecting Himself to the same baptism we do for the same gift of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit enters us He has to fight against our sinful natures and conquer our sinful flesh. But when the Holy Spirit enters the holy Son of God? No inhibitions? Perfect faith? This is going to be an amazing thing! He is going to save the world!

This would still be no easy task. His baptism was like ringing the bell in a title fight. God was putting the devil and the world on notice. The Messiah is in town! The first place the Spirit led Him was into the desert to fight against Satan by Himself. And that bears noting. Baptism makes you an enemy of Satan. It makes life more difficult in some senses. You become enemy #1. Satan starts plotting for ways to get you to fall from faith. Paul writes, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. God never said living as a Christian would be easy. Yet how many of us imagine that life is supposedly easy, as long as we pray once in a while, go to church occasionally, and work hard. We think it’s easy because we take our sins lightly. We don’t fight against them. We accept them. “It’s just how I am.” We let the devil get his way and we don’t even realize it. Or maybe we live with the excuse, “I’m only human. I can’t help it. God made me this way.” So we give up the fight without even really trying. It’s easy because we don’t struggle like we SHOULD. When you take your sins seriously and Satan seriously, you know life isn’t so easy. It sometimes seems impossible with the way our society is going. In many ways it is!

With our baptism, we have someone who is more powerful than Satan fighting inside of us and for us. He is the Holy Spirit. He worked inside of Jesus, and He works inside of us too! Baptism gives us this powerful Holy Spirit, who enables us to live for Christ and fight against Satan and our own sinful natures. Baptism is meant to empower us also with the same Holy Spirit! So no more excuses as to why you can’t fight against this sin or that one. You aren’t as weak as you claim to be, because the Holy Spirit is living in you.

Finally, we can’t help but notice that above and behind the Holy Spirit heaven has opened up. And what happens? God the Father speaks! We are used to Jesus speaking. He is called the Word made flesh. But here the Father speaks with His own voice! The same God who spoke from the top of Mt. Sinai speaks again! No

words of terror that incite fear. These are words of joy and pride and exaltation. “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Here the Father is proud to introduce the Son to the world. He loves His Son. He is happy with Him and glowing with praise! The Father says it here at the beginning of His ministry. What does that mean? In the case of Jesus, He was born for this moment, and He has prepared Himself for this moment. He has studied the Word. He has prayed. He has obeyed the Sabbath. And now He has stepped up to the plate, ready to take on the responsibility of the world.

There's a reason He is telling this to the world. He wants us to be happy with Him too. He is sharing Jesus with us. He wants us to be pleased with Jesus too! But the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law were threatened with Him. They didn't like how He pointed out their hypocrisy and their sin. Like Cain who was jealous of Abel, they murdered Him, the Father's beloved. It might be one thing if Jesus were a rebellious son, a real smartmouth, a disobedient child. Then the Father might have said, “Go ahead and stone him.” But this was someone that the Father loved. This was someone who proclaimed the Word faithfully and boldly. And we, humanity, we hated Him for it and we killed Him. Aren't we born of the same stock? The Pharisees only showed the jealousy of humanity and the desire for power that we all have, the desire for God to be dead to us, so that we can be God. If they hadn't done it, we very likely could have, because we have the same sinful nature. The Father should damn us all for what we'd done to Him.

But then we see the Father speak to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew what we would do, and that is what makes His gift so great. He says, “Go to the cross. There is no other way. This is what would please me most, for you to die for the sins of the world.” What kind of love does the Father have for His Son, to damn Him to hell? But this is where the baptism was meant to lead Jesus, to that bloody death. There are three that testify, the Spirit, the water, and the blood. Listen to Him cry from the cross, “Father forgive them. It is finished.” Here God the Father speaks to us through the Son and He says, “See how much I love you. Listen to what my Son has done for you. With Him I am well pleased.” So much so that He raised Jesus from the dead.

And so the Son brings His baptism full circle through His death and resurrection. He walked into the water to do a job of saving the world. He did what He was baptized to do. Now when we walk into the water, we are born into this new life and given this new identity. Everything that Jesus did, we get credit for, as the Holy Spirit brings us to faith and keeps us in the faith. Paul said in Romans 6:3,

“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.”

John must have wondered what would happen that day as Jesus walked up to him to be baptized. It didn’t seem to make sense. But it didn’t take long for John to see that Jesus truly was the One. His eyes and his ears saw it all unfold before him. I have heard lots of funny stories over the years about people being baptized and lots of wonderful and heartwarming stories and I have a few of my own but John, John wins. He wins the baptism stories, no doubt. Can you imagine how it was when he went to the next preacher’s luncheon and he’s sitting around talking to some other preachers and one of them asks, "So, how's your ministry, John?" "Oh, pretty good. Been busy. I got to baptize Jesus the other day..." And the room gets silent. "You did what? Why? I thought you baptized for the forgiveness of sins. I'm confused." "Well, I tried not to, but He insisted."

What does this mean for you? You may not see it and you may not hear it sounding from heaven when you or your children are baptized, but God’s Word promises the same gifts in your baptism as well. Because Jesus walked into baptism, now you also are given the gift of the Holy Spirit, approved by God the Father, united and bathed in Jesus when you are baptized. Now, through faith in Jesus, you are the one whom God loves too, the one who has been saved and bathed in the waters of salvation, all because Jesus started it there on the Jordan. It all begins at His baptism.

Amen!