

Baptism of Our Lord - 1/8/2017

Text: Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus was thirty when He went down to the Jordan to be baptized by the prophet John the Baptizer. John was baptizing for the forgiveness of sins. But Jesus is perfect, He needs no forgiveness. Why is He baptized?

Imagine a huge flock of sheep all gathered on the bank of the Jordan, pressing toward the water. One by one they go down to John, standing there in the river. Now these sheep are filthy, disgusting, covered in filth and black smudge. They have burrs and thorns caught in their wool, and they are ragged, nasty looking sheep.

That's you. That's me.

And as these sheep step into the water and John pours water over them and says, "I baptize you for the forgiveness of all of your sins," then all of the muck and filth washes off of these sheep, these lambs, and they walk out of the other side of the river pure, white, gleaming. Sheep after sheep comes into the water, and all of the dirt and blood is washed off. Sheep after sheep is washed clean, while the water is covered, like a swamp or an oil spill.

Now imagine that in the middle of all of these dirty disgusting sheep there is one sheep who is white, gleaming, stunning to look at. This Lamb is without spot or blemish, perfect in every way. And now this perfect white woolly Lamb comes to the edge of the water, and John sees Him, and tries to prevent Him coming into the filth, saying, **"I need to be baptized by you, and do You come to me?"**

But this perfect Lamb answers, saying, **"Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."** So this perfect Lamb steps into the water, and as He does all the filth and muck and stain and thorn and dirt and blood that is swirling around on the water is absorbed onto Him; His wool is saturated with your uncleanness and my unrighteousness. All of it. And this Lamb walks out of the river bearing all the filth of all the sheep of all the world. And now the water is clear and pure, and this Lamb is near unrecognizable. **"he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him."** (Isaiah 53:2)

And there is John, in the river, and He points to this Sheep and says, **"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."** This is Jesus, who knew no sin, the One whom God made

to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. **"Surely He has borne (carried) our griefs and carried our sorrows."** (Isaiah 53:4)

In this image we have the baptism and the death of Jesus and our baptism all wrapped up together. This is how it should be. The baptism of Jesus is the first step on the road that ends at the cross, and at Jesus' cross He fills up the promise of the forgiveness of all sins, the gift that baptism gives to us.

Jesus bears our sins; He takes on Himself our sinfulness. This is key to understanding the work of the Holy Trinity in our salvation. Dr. Luther called this teaching the "Great Exchange."

There is a story told about Luther: You all know that Luther had the Bible's teaching down that we can do nothing to save ourselves, that salvation is a work of God alone. So someone asked him, "Have you contributed anything to your salvation?" His answer was... "Yes... I've given Jesus my sin, my death, my hell, my punishment..."

This is how our salvation is: we give sin and death and our devilish chains over to Christ, and the Lord gives us in exchange His forgiveness and life and salvation. This is a great exchange indeed.

Let's put this in perspective. You see a beautiful home, and you go to buy it, and the owner says "You give me \$200,000 and I'll give you this house." That's a decent exchange, a good one depending on the house. Here's a better exchange: the owner of the home says, "You give me your car, and I'll give you this house." Now we're getting somewhere. But let's go even further: the man says, "You give me that half-eaten bag of cheetos, and I'll give you this house." This is getting to be a really good deal, at least it is if you have a bag of cheetos. This is a good exchange. But this is not yet what's going on with Jesus. We have to go further. The man says, "You give me that bag of garbage, the one with the dirty diapers and banana peels and the maggotty meat, you give me that, and I will give you this home." Now that is a *great* exchange.

Yet Jesus goes even farther/ He takes our sin, our death, our wretchedness, the wrath and hell that our iniquities have earned, all of this for all of us, and He gives us His kingdom, His name, His holiness, His perfection, His Holy Spirit, His eternal life, His hope, His resurrection. He takes what is ours, what is bad, and He gives us what is His, what is good. The great exchange: **"For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."** (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Such an exchange is unheard of! **"For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Romans 5:7-8)

If you want to see what we have given Jesus, then we simply look to the cross. That's where He really gets it. And there we see the shame and forsakenness and suffering that we deserve (indeed that is ours!) handed over to, and gladly received by, Jesus.

And all of this is brought to us in the gift of our baptism. That's where the exchange is completed. Jesus gives us what is His, His name and life and joy and forgiveness. The font is where we are reborn as children of the heavenly Father, where we are adopted as God's children, where we are made heirs of the eternal kingdom, and where we are rescued from the devil and death and sin.

Remember the words that the heavenly Father spoke of Jesus at His baptism? We heard them in the text, **"Behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'"** Even this, the good pleasure of His Father, our Jesus shares with you. In your baptism you are declared a child of God, and by faith you too have these words spoken from heaven to you, "You are my beloved children, with whom I am well pleased."

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