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The Baptism of our Lord
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JESUS' BAPTISM IS HIS ORDINATION DAY

Baptized into Jesus, you are forgiven and risen to die no more!

Hear the Word of God from Mark 1,

“John came baptizing in the wilderness, and proclaiming a baptism of repentance unto the forgiveness of sins...At that time, Jesus came from Galilee, to the Jordan, ...As soon as Jesus was baptized, He came out of the water. At that moment heaven was torn open; and he (John) saw the Spirit of God descending on Him (Jesus) like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with Whom I am well-pleased.’

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

Short of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection, there is no single event more important for us and our salvation than the Baptism of Jesus. But for some reason, Jesus' Baptism often gets overlooked as ‘not all that important’. Well it is important, and today we're going to see why.

Jesus and John the Baptizer were not total strangers. They were actually cousins. Jesus and John came near each other when they were still in the waters of their mothers' wombs. And on that day, you may remember, John the Baptizer leaped in the womb of Elizabeth, when Jesus – still in the womb of Mary – entered Elizabeth's house. Why? Because the Savior had arrived to bringing peace on earth to all mankind on whom God's favor rests.

Now, 30 years later, John and Jesus meet in the waters again. But this time it's not the maternal waters of physical birth, it's the baptismal waters of spiritual birth which were taking place in the Jordan River. Remember what Jesus said in John 3, ***"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."*** In other words, sinners need rebirth into the new and resurrected life baptism gives.

But that raises an interesting question. Why is Jesus being baptized? He's not sinful. Hebrews says, ***"He was tempted in every way that we are, but He did not sin."*** And the Gospel of John adds, ***"He always did what was pleasing to His Father."*** And 1st Peter 2 declares, ***"He committed no sin."*** So why is Jesus being baptized?

We're the ones who have sinned. We're the ones who committed the crimes. We not only sin in thought, word, and deed, we sin frequently and easily, we sin knowingly and unknowingly, we sin willingly and unwillingly. We're repeat offenders. As Romans 1 says, ***"We even invent ways of sinning."*** The late Dr. Moellering of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, describes us as ***"Creative sinners"***, when he says: ***"When it comes to sin we sniff it, drink it, shoot it, smell it, smoke it, chew it, lie in it; roll in it, sleep in it; read it, watch it, log onto it, lust after it, buy it, hoard it, and glory in it. But what we so often forget is that the "IT" will finally kill you, regardless of what particular "IT" you are prone to commit."*** Paul puts it like this in Phillipians 3, ***"I say to you again, even with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their 'god' is their stomach. Their 'glory' is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. And their destiny is destruction."***

Yet, Jesus is totally sinless. So why is He being baptized? Luther puts it like this: ***"Jesus' Baptism is His ordination day into the Office of 'Savior'. At His Baptism, Jesus is being publicly singled out (that's what ordination means) for God's work of: 'going to the cross and dying for a world full of sinners'".*** That's why Jesus is being baptized. At His Baptism, Jesus is publicly and officially taking on the role of being: ***"The Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world."*** This is what's going on! On this day, Jesus is becoming the greatest sinner in the history of the world, even though He never sinned a single sin, because God is laying on, pouring on, or washing all of our sins onto Jesus. 2nd Corinthians 5 puts it like this, ***"God made Him Who had no sin, to be sin for us."*** That's what's happening at Jesus Baptism. **Page 2**

Those of you who are old enough may remember a time when you didn't have running water in your house. So what you had to do is to go outside to a cistern, and there you would pump one bucket full of water at a time, and then carry it into the house. However, if it was bath night, which was usually Saturday night, as you were getting ready for church, then you also had to heat the water on the stove in the house, before pouring the hot water into the bathtub, or the washtub. Now, since I'm WAYYYYYYY TOOOO YOUNG, I never experienced such a bath, but both my mom and dad did, and they told me all about it. But here's the next problem. Since it was so much work, and took so long to bring in the water and heat it up, everyone would take a bath, one at a time, in the same bath water. Now imagine if you came from a large family. Let's say, a mom and a dad, and 8 kids. That meant 10 people would take a bath in the same bath water, one at a time, and usually from the oldest to youngest. Imagine if you're the baby of the family, and 9 family members have already taken their WEEKLY bath in the tub before you, and by the time it's your turn to get in, not only is the water probably cold, but you can imagine – without me describing it – how dirty the water would be when it's time for you to take your bath. If you were one of the last ones to take a bath, you probably got out of the tub with more dirt and grime washed onto you, than what was washed off of you.

But that is actually a great picture of what is going on in Jesus' Baptism. 30 years earlier Jesus had taken on flesh and blood at Christmas so He could bleed and die for our sins. And now, 30 years later, Jesus is stepping into waters of the Jordan River, at His Baptism, to have all of our sins washed onto Him for which He came to bleed and die. Isaiah 53 says: ***“The Lord laid on Him the iniquities of us all” and “He was numbered with the transgressors.”*** That's what's going on at Jesus' Baptism.

You see, the question we needed answered was: *“Who can get me out of the mess, my sins have gotten me into?”* That's why Jesus is being baptized into your sin and death. Or again, *“Who can get me out of this ocean of sin, and the waves of God's wrath, that I'm drowning in?”* Look who's stepping into the water of the Jordan River. In Jesus' Baptism all of our sins are being washed onto Him, so that in our Baptism all of our sins are washed off of us. In Jesus' Baptism all of our death is being washed on Jesus. So that in our Baptism, all of Jesus' resurrection life is being washed onto us.

The importance of Jesus' Baptism can't be overestimated. Just as Jesus borrowed a death that was not His own at the cross, on this day Jesus is borrowing sins that are not His own – yet, He is claiming them as His own – so that He can go to the cross and bleed and die for every sin that made God mad at us. Jesus' Baptism is His inauguration or ordination into the office of “Savior of the World”. On this day Jesus is being publicly circled-out as the lightning rod God will use to punish our sin upon.

If you feel that the Baptism of Jesus is just an unimportant detail that Pastors like to bore the sheep with, then remember this: unless you know how to get out of the mess your sins have gotten you into, you need the Baptism of Jesus. Unless you are willing to face the eternal death your sins deserve, then you need the Baptism of Jesus. Unless you have some other friend who can take your place in hell, then you need the Baptism of Jesus. If your sins are not washed onto Jesus at His Baptism, then they cannot be washed off of you in your baptism. Remember, we're saved on God's terms, not our terms. And God's terms are: forgiveness comes only through the crucified and risen Savior Jesus, and Jesus is entering the office of being crucified and rising again by His Baptism in the Jordan. Which means what? Already at Jesus' Baptism, Jesus is taking up your cross and mine every bit as much as He did when Pilate's soldiers nailed his feet and hands to the tree. Jesus is heroically taking on a death that should not be His, but is absolutely His, because our Gracious Father is laying our death on Jesus to get us out of the mess that our sins got us into. Isn't it great to be a Christian, and to know that Good News?

For a brief moment John the Baptizer hesitated, and said, ***“I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?”*** And Jesus told his cousin, ***“Let it be so now, for it is necessary in order to fulfill all righteousness.”*** That is, to fulfill all righteousness according to God's plan, and to fulfill all righteousness for us – the unrighteous. On this day Jesus is binding Himself, and taking His oath of office, to avoid all detours, and to stop short of nothing but the cross – to follow through to the bitter end, doomed to death, so can now have our sins washed off of us, and Jesus' righteousness washed onto us in our Baptism.

We're told in Mark 1, ***‘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 remaining on Him. And a voice from Heaven said, ‘This is My Son, Whom I love, and with Whom I am well-pleased.’*** **Page 4**

Now let's put "2 and 2" together. The same Triune God Who was present on the banks of the Jordan River – God's Son was being baptized, the Holy Spirit descended, and the Father proclaimed, ***"This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased,"*** is the same Triune God who comes to the banks of your baptism and mine. When you and I are baptized, we're baptized united with Jesus in the water, the Holy Spirit descends and remains on us to enliven us and live with and in us, and the same Father says to us, ***"You are my beloved child, with whom I am well-pleased,"*** not because we've lived a well-pleasing life. We haven't. But because in our Baptism the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit place on us the well-pleasing, perfect righteousness of Jesus.

Even if you can't understand how God could forgive you through the death of another and then apply Jesus' forgiveness to you with a little bit of water, and a few words, remember: ***"God does what He says He does, and how He manages to pull it off is none of our business."*** If God says you're forgiven in the death of Jesus, then you're forgiven in the death of Jesus. Remember, Grace isn't always logical, but it's always amazing. And if God says your forgiven in your baptism, then your forgiven in your baptism, not to return to a life of sin which can nullify the new life God gave in your baptism. But you're forgiven in your baptism, both to stand before God as righteous and accepted as God's own Son, Jesus, but in that forgiveness you're not only free from the guilt of sin but you now have the ammunition to fight the power of sin in you

But how can a little bit of water and a few words unite me with Christ, forgiven all my sins, and raise me up from death to die no more? That's a fair question, to which we have a great answer. Remember, with just a word, God said, ***"Let there be 'Light', and there was 'Light'."*** With just a word God said, ***"Let there be a sun, moon, and stars, and there were a sun, moon, and stars."*** Throughout Jesus' ministry, He simply spoke His all-powerful words and great things happened. He said to the blind, 'SEE' and they saw. To the deaf 'HEAR' and they heard. To the mute 'SPEAK' and they spoke. And to the dead "RISE" and they ROSE. So when God says, in Acts 2, ***"Be baptized everyone of you for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*** You are forgiven, and the Holy Spirit now lives in you. When God says in Galatians 3, ***"All of you who have been baptized into Christ, have been clothed with Christ,"*** you are clothed with the righteousness of Jesus. And when God's Word says in 1st Peter 3, ***"Baptism saves you. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus,"*** then you're saved by the resurrection of Jesus. ***Page 5***

The early Christians believe that the Jordan River, with Jesus standing in those waters, taking on Himself our death and sin, together with the water that flowed from Jesus' pierced side on the cross, when He died to save us, they believed that those waters run downhill to every Baptismal font, together with everything that Jesus placed into those waters: righteousness, forgiveness, new life, resurrection, and heaven. All of Jesus' gifts flow downstream and are washed onto us in our Baptism, because God says so.

In closing, Jesus' ministry both begins and end with a Baptism. It begins with a water Baptism in the Jordan river, in which the Father lays on Jesus the iniquities of us all, and Jesus is publicly circled out into the office of Savior. And then Jesus' ministry ends with a Baptism in blood on Calvary's cross, where Jesus body is immersed in His own blood, as He fulfills the Office of the “***Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world.***” Pull it all together, and it is BOTH Jesus' water Baptism in the Jordan, and His blood Baptism on the cross, that makes our Baptism to be:

*“a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins,
and sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains.”*

AMEN!