

Epiphany 1 / The Baptism of Jesus

January 8, 2023

Romans 6:3-4

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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."

Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of His public ministry and was accompanied by signs, attesting to His divinity and rightful claim to the promises made to the line of King David. When Jesus came to be baptized, John was initially hesitant. He said, *"I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"* John reacted in this manner because he knew who Jesus was to be, and could think of no place in the scriptures where it said the Messiah would be manifested in this way. He knew the Messiah would be the Son of Righteousness, come to deliver the people from their sins. John's work was to prepare the way for Messiah's coming, by making the people aware of their sin and their need for this Saviour, so why was He coming to him to be baptized for the forgiveness of sin.

Jesus didn't give a reason. He simply said, *"Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting to fulfill all righteousness."* Jesus was baptized to visibly represent the work He came to fulfill, bearing in His body the sins of the world. By receiving baptism in water made dirty by the sins of those who needed to repent, Jesus was preparing to bear our sins through the suffering and death of His cross. St. Paul would later write, *"God made Him who had no sin to be a sin offering that in Him we would become the righteousness of God."* Jesus' baptism was also His anointing, by which He was declared the king of righteousness. All Israel's kings received their kingship through anointing by a prophet. John hadn't expected it to happen this way, but in baptism, Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit as Israel's king and declared by God to be His beloved Son, with whom He was well pleased.

Jesus' baptism serves as a pattern for Christian baptism, which replaced circumcision as the means by which people are made recipients of the blessings of the covenant and made part of the community of believers. Circumcision was a serious matter under the Covenant of Mount Sinai. It was so serious that the Lord said that anyone who was not circumcised, even though born of Hebrew parents, was not considered part of the covenant community. Circumcision was treated seriously, because it was God's testimony that these people were recipients of His

promises of faith, forgiveness and salvation. In a similar manner, Christian baptism is God's promise that the people who receive it are His children for the sake of Christ; recipients of the benefits of Christ's life, death and resurrection. Like circumcision, baptism is administered even to infant children. It is God's promise, not ours. It is a promise received through faith, not intellectual assent. Faith is first and foremost the gift of God by which we trust Him in our hearts, apart from understanding. As King David confessed in Psalm 22, *"You made me trust you, even at my mother's breast."*

The biggest difference between baptism and circumcision—apart from the process itself—is that baptism is administered to both male and female. Only males were circumcised under the Covenant of Mount Sinai. Perhaps only males were circumcised to emphasize the particularity of the Sinai Covenant, which was generally restricted to people of Hebrew descent. On the other hand, the New Covenant extends to people from every nation, tribe and language. Regardless, both were means by which God gave His grace and the promise of salvation to those who received them. In our baptism God promises to forgive our sins, free us from their control and bring us to eternal life through the resurrection of Jesus. Paul wrote: *"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."*

Baptism is both a dying and a rising with Christ. When Christ died and rose, He took away the power of sin. By His death and resurrection, Christ took control of sin, so that sin no longer has power over Him. During His earthly life, Christ was never under the power of sin as we are. Unlike us, He did not have a sinful nature and so sin had nothing to latch onto. Although without sin, He voluntarily put Himself under the dominion of sin, in the sense that He allowed Himself to experience and suffer the effects of life in a world in bondage to sin and under the condemnation of death. Jesus hungered. Jesus wept. Jesus suffered. He bled and died. He allowed sin to affect Him, so that He might destroy sin and free those held under its control and condemnation. It says in the letter to the Hebrews, *"Since the children have flesh and blood He too shared in their humanity that He might destroy Him who holds the power of death—that is the devil—and free those who all their lives were slaves because of their fear of death."* The power of death is sin. Through His death and resurrection Christ took away the power of sin. He gives us the same power and victory in our baptism into His death and resurrection.

In our baptism God promised that for the sake of Christ, we too would die to the control and condemnation of sin. Unlike Christ, we are born with a sinful

nature. We are separated from God through the sin of the first people. When sin approaches us, it finds much to latch onto. In fact, the bible speaks of people in this fallen world as being in complete bondage to sin. Even at our very best, our actions are always tainted by the stain of sin. This stain persists even in the lives of those who believe and are baptized. St. Paul attests to this later in the letter to the Romans, when he writes: *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”* He asks, who will rescue him from this body of death. Jesus is the answer! In our baptism Jesus gives us a share of His victory over sin. He set us free from the control of sin in our lives, as well as from its condemnation of eternal death. Jesus gives us life and the power to walk in newness of life!

Even as God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit at His baptism, He blesses us with the Holy Spirit in our baptism. The Holy Spirit creates a new nature within us, sinless and at peace with God. According to new nature created by the Holy Spirit, we are able to overcome temptation and resist the power of sin. When Jesus was baptized the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and the Father’s voice declared Him, His beloved Son with whom He was well pleased. Nothing so visually dramatic and awe inspiring occurred at our baptism. However, something just as amazing did occur within our souls. When we were baptized, God opened our hearts to faith to receive Jesus as our Saviour. He blessed us with forgiveness, the promise of eternal life. He gave us the Holy Spirit, who made our hearts His home and our bodies His dwelling place. St. Paul said to the Corinthians, *“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells within you.”* What an amazing thing to have the power of God always present to forgive our sins, to give us strength in the face of sin and temptation. Yet this is what we receive through our baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ.

We give thanks to God for the many great and gracious gifts that He bestows upon us in and through baptism. He blesses us with forgiveness that flows continuously, as an ever-flowing fountain. He blesses us with the Holy Spirit, who makes our hearts His home and our bodies His holy temple. He blesses us with mind of Christ to understand the scriptures and walk in their light. He blesses us with the gift of Christ’s body and blood and the faith to receive the forgiveness they offer. He gives Jesus to stand with us, so we may overcome temptation, face the challenges and trials of life in a world that chooses to remain in bondage to sin and under the condemnation of death. The power of baptism is the death and

resurrection of Christ. In this power God promises that nothing in all creation, not even death, will be able to separate us from His love. Consider the great and gracious gifts God gives us in this life for the sake of Christ! Imagine what greater gifts will He give us in eternal life, when Christ returns and makes the promise of our baptism full, calling us to rise from the dust of death to share in Christ's resurrection and take our place at the feast of life in His kingdom.

God who has promised all these and more in our baptism, keep us in this grace until His promises are made full in the resurrection to life everlasting. In Jesus' Name.
Amen