

Isaiah 42:1-9

Sharing the Baptism of Our Lord

Psalm 29

Acts:10:34-43

Matthew 3:13-17

**13Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. 14John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."
"This is the word of the Lord . . . Thanks be to God"**

When we were in Germany we used to witness confirmation Sunday as a "going away party." Young people who were baptized as babies would go through 3 years of confirmation classes for them to get the party, the presents, the money, the ceremony, and then after that day, it was often rare to see any of them back in church again. Here we have believers' baptism, where the young people are first baptized about the same age as other denominations have confirmation.

I have actually baptized more adults in America than youth, and that is quite a different experience, I believe. Adults who have come to recognize their Savior in Jesus Christ have a totally different experience with the practice of faith than those youth who seem, to many, to be just going through a rite that is expected of them.

The truth is, I believe, that regardless of when one is baptized, there comes a time in every believer's life when the closeness of God through the life of Jesus becomes particularly meaningful. We may go through phases, but we will never forget those moments of awareness of how meaningful our faith is to our lives.

And that is why I believe the remembrance of Jesus' Baptism and our own – regardless of if we can remember it or not, we re-live it again with each other here today. The fact is, baptism should mark the beginning of Christians' experience with the community of believers, not the end, just as in this scripture marking the beginning of Christ's ministry.

Martin Luther wrote of this passage, "The Son, who is without sin, allows himself to be baptized for our example and our comfort. He does something here that is not required of him, whereas we do nothing that is not required of us. More, we do what is evil. How will we ever get to the point of doing something not required? Christ is holier even than baptism, yet still allows himself to be baptized. Thereby he institutes baptism . . . John indeed saw that the heavens were opened. That was a sign that our Lord God holds baptism dear – baptism that was sanctified by the Son of God himself in his own body. The heavens, previously closed, are now opened, becoming a clear gateway and window for us to see into heaven itself. There is no longer a dividing line between God and us, for he has descended into the [baptismal] water."

It was here that the first full proclamation of Jesus' relationship to God was pronounced. Troy Miller calls it "a paradoxical blend of magnificence and humility." Jesus' divinity is shouted from the heavens - and yet he aligns himself with the one who cried in the wilderness to repent - and he spent his ministry serving others, leading early Christians to sing the Christ hymn - found in Philippians 2:5b-11:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.

9Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus' Baptism here represents a transformation of some sort - a rite that he must go through, **But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness."**

"Water is considered a purifier in most religions. Major faiths that incorporate ritual washing (ablution) include Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Rastafari movement, Shinto, Taoism, Judaism, and Wicca." (Wikipedia) Water represents birth and rebirth. "The human body contains anywhere from 55% to 78% water depending on body size." (Wikipedia) Water is essential to life on this earth. We can live a long time without food as long as we have plenty of water - but the reverse cannot be said.

In a way, just as, if you recall, our Lord's Prayer emphasized how basic our needs are that God cares for us - bread, debts, temptations, protection from evil - the beginning of our faith is marked by the simple unifying element of water. All humans need it - it cleanses, it nourishes, it heals.

Baptism is to be an experience where we, through the symbolic act of being immersed in water - of dying and being reborn - our sins being washed away - and therefore we are united with others who have experienced a similar birth and rebirth. We are all reborn of the element - water. We are all children of God through this rebirth and because Jesus did it too, he shared with us our same process.

Imagine the degree to which Jesus wanted to share his life with us, to be a part of our pain and our joys - the baptism represents the same process as his suffering and death and resurrection. Sins removed and rebirth - hope through faith. He shares all of this with us.

How wonderful for the installation to be on this day - beginning or restarting a ministry on the day we contemplate Jesus' Baptism - what it meant for him and what it means for us. May all who have taken vows today and all who have ever taken on vows in this church to serve the congregation and community truly feel a part of the life of Christ. Feel his presence this day and everyday and know that we are all members of his family together. AMEN