

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
The Baptism of Our Lord – January 12, 2025
Matthew 3:13-17 – To Fulfill All Righteousness
Rev Peter Wagner

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

This is my Son. Focus on him. Look at him. Listen to him. Find life and salvation in him alone.

Today, all the focus is on the Son. The Father wants you to look at the Son. The Spirit descends on him in the form of a dove, so that you will know that this Jesus, the Son, is anointed by God with the Holy Spirit. This is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. All of Scripture, all the Old Testament prophecy, it all points to him.

So now the Holy Spirit comes down and rests on him, and the voice of the Father speaks from heaven, telling you to look at him, and pay attention to him.

Because God wants you to know him through the Son. In the Son you see God. In the Son you have access to God. In the Son you can call God your Father and inherit all God's promises.

Therefore the Son says to you, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” And the Son says, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” Yes, “Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.” For “Through him,” through the Son, “we have access in one Spirit to the Father.”

The Son, the Son, the Son. Pay attention to Jesus, turn to Jesus. Come to God through him, for in him you have the whole Godhead, the whole Trinity. In him you have access to God. He is our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

But our sinful human nature loves to focus on anything but Jesus, anything but the Son. Satan always tries to drag our eyes away from him, to concentrate on something – anything – else.

As far as Satan is concerned, anything is better than Jesus. So Satan is okay with letting us celebrate Christmas, as long as we're focused on the holiday spirit, or the presents, or the songs and decorations, or the busy preparations, or the nostalgic traditions – anything but Jesus.

And Satan is even willing to let you come to church, as long as you're focused on the church community and the uplifting atmosphere and the pastor's personality. The devil doesn't mind if you sit in the pew, as long as your mind is wandering from the sermon. He doesn't even mind if you come to communion, as long as you come without repentance and faith, without meditating on the true body and blood of the risen Son, that you eat and drink here. As long as you're coming to church for anything but Jesus and thinking about anything but Jesus, Satan is happy.

So turn to Jesus. Fight these temptations and distractions. Listen to Jesus. Study his word. Make him your highest treasure and your only joy.

And today, the feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, since all the focus is on Jesus, let us pay special attention to what Jesus is doing, and what he is saying.

Today, the Son of God is here, standing in our midst, as a man, coming to the Jordan to be baptized by John. And God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are here too, telling us to look at him. The Father tells us, “This is my beloved Son,” and the Holy Spirit comes to rest on him.

John has been baptizing the people out here in the wilderness, a baptism of repentance. He's been preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” And he's been saying, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”

But now, Jesus is here, the Lamb of God, God the Son incarnate, who no human being, not even John, the greatest among those born of women, none of us are worthy to untie his sandal strap.

And John knows who Jesus is. He knows this is the true and living God, the perfect and sinless offering for the sins of the world, the mighty King and Savior. John knows he is not worthy to untie his sandals, much less baptize him.

For like the rest of us, John is a sinful man. He needs to be baptized by Jesus, not the other way around. He needs Jesus to wash away his sins, to cleanse him from guilt.

John knows he must practice what he preaches, he himself needs to turn away from sin and be baptized,

in order to prepare his own heart for Jesus to come and enter in.

So what are you doing here, Jesus? Why have you come to be baptized by me? Of all people, Jesus, you alone do not need to repent and be baptized, for truly you have no sin.

Listen to what Jesus says, pay attention to the answer. "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

Thus it is fitting. It is proper. This needs to happen. It must happen. I must be baptized, in order to fulfill all righteousness.

Because I have come not to be served, but to serve. You are right, John, I am greater than you. And you are right, I have no sin. But I have come to be your servant, the servant of the world. I am the mighty God, but I have not come to break a bruised reed or snuff out a faintly burning wick. I have not come to destroy, but to heal. To be a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. So I have come to serve you, to wash your feet, to lay down my life for you and all sinners, so that in me you may have the righteousness of God.

Though I know no sin, I have come to be sin for you, to suffer your punishment, to exchange your sin for my righteousness, so that in me you might become the righteousness of God.

I am clean, you are dirty. I have no sin, you are filthy with it. But today I have come to the Jordan river, to the waters where you are washing the people in repentance. I've come to these filthy waters, contaminated by all the sin washed from all these people, and I've come to be baptized here, in order to suck the filth out of these waters, to take all the sins of all the sinners who've ever been baptized and ever will be baptized, to take their sin on myself, on my holy body, and make these baptismal waters clean with my righteousness.

Yes, Jesus has come to fulfill all righteousness. The Lamb of God has come to take away the sin of the world, all the sin washed away from us in baptism, and exchange it for his righteousness.

So when we are baptized, we go into the water dirty, and come out clean. But when Jesus is baptized, he goes into the water clean, and he comes out dirty, in order to bear all our iniquity and carry it to the cross and put it to death there.

Thus, our Lord Jesus, by his baptism in the Jordan, sanctifies all water, to make it holy and pure, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of renewal and rebirth in the Holy Spirit.

So, he says to John, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." For as your servant, I have come to fulfill baptism, to fill it up with the righteousness of God. For I am God himself, and apart from me, the water of baptism is plain water and nothing else. Apart from me and my righteousness, baptism is useless. Your washing would be in vain, it would make no one clean, it would forgive nothing. Without me it would just be a way to show your commitment and dedication to God, to show that you're sorry for your sins, but it would have no power to actually do anything for you. Without me, baptism has no power to save, to actually wash away sins, or make anyone a child of God.

But with me, if I come to be baptized and sanctify the water, then baptism has me in it, it has my righteousness. If I fulfill baptism, if I fill it up and give it power, then baptism is not just plain water, but a true baptism, rich in grace, and a washing of rebirth and renewal in the Holy Spirit. Then it has the power of the Triune God himself, so that all who are baptized into me and my name will become children of God.

And truly, those who are baptized into me, the Son, if you are baptized into me, then you are adopted into everything that I have, sonship with God. You become heirs with me, sons of God and co-heirs with me of eternal life. In me, through baptism, you have the Holy Spirit poured out on you, just as he came on me. And my Father becomes your Father too, so that you have access to God.

In me, you now have the right to call upon God, to pray to him as Father and ask him with all boldness and confidence as dear children ask their dear Father. Baptized into my name, the name of the Son, you have the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom you now cry, "Abba! Father!"

Thanks be to our Triune God, through the Son, our Savior! Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.