

# Sermon Series – Matthew 3:13-17

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*Preached on the Baptism of Our Lord, January 13, 2013*

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## The Baptism of Our Lord

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 42:1-7

Psalm: Psalm 85

New Testament Reading: Romans 12:1-5

Gospel Reading: Matthew 3:13-17

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### **Your baptism was more than mere water, it was God marking you as His very own**

Our gospel lesson today concerning the Baptism of Jesus reminds me of Martin Luther. Usually, when we speak of Martin Luther, we discuss the nailing of a list of differences he had with the church at the time. Today marks a difference that was not on his initial list, but nonetheless was a disagreement of which he was vocal. For Martin Luther, the Baptism of Our Lord, was the Sunday in the season of Epiphany. Within the church calendar, the celebration of the Magi seeking Jesus is usually observed on the Sunday known as The Epiphany of Our Lord. However, Luther wanted the Baptism of Our Lord to be the pinnacle of the season of Epiphany. Luther found this particular day of the church year that celebrated the Lord's Baptism to be most glorious. On this day, we read of our Savior, Jesus Christ, beginning His ministry at His baptism in the Jordan River. As such, I would like to take this time and share with you some of the interesting points Luther preached within his sermons concerning this glorious day in the life of our Lord. Luther recognized that Baptism is not simply plain water. Instead, he understood the Scriptures to say that Baptism is something more than water. In fact, Baptism is Christ marking you as His very own.

The first fact that Luther points out in his sermons, is that in this text we have today, Christ is identifying Himself with all mankind in His baptism. During this period of time, John is baptizing people in the Jordan River. Why is he baptizing people? John calls on the people to repent and be baptized for the remission of sin. Jesus now approaches John and asks to receive this baptism. Does our Lord and Savior need to repent of sin? Quite clearly, the answer is, “No”. Does Jesus need to be forgiven of sin? Again, quite clearly the answer is, “No”. So why is Jesus seeking baptism from John? Even John is perplexed by the request, for John recognizes the Messiah.<sup>1</sup> John points out that Jesus has this all backwards, for it is John that should be baptized by Jesus. Yet, what Jesus is doing is identifying Himself with mankind. Jesus is not only one-hundred percent God, but He is also one-hundred percent man. It is within His manhood that Christ chooses to be identified with us in baptism. In the Old Testament, the Levites were chosen to begin their ministry as priests when they were thirty years old.<sup>2</sup> They were anointed, marked, and ready to begin their ministry as intercessors between God and man. The baptism of Jesus also is an anointing that takes place when Jesus is thirty years old.<sup>3</sup> His anointing and marking also inaugurates His entrance into the ministry as intercessor between God and man. In fact, Jesus is to be the last and most perfect intercessor for us. One last fact concerning Jesus’ identification with man at His baptism concerns sin. As was mentioned earlier, baptism was for the remission of sins, yet Jesus has no sins to be forgiven. However, although Jesus led the perfect, obedient life and never sinned, Jesus became sin for our sake. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “God made him who

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:29

<sup>2</sup> Numbers 4:1-3

<sup>3</sup> Luke 3:23

had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”.<sup>4</sup> Jesus was baptized by John not only to demonstrate His humanity, but also to identify with His sacrifice. When theologians write about Christ’s humiliation, they are focusing on God assuming human form and the events that lead to the cross. Jesus, as God, became man in order to become a saving sacrifice to save you. This sacrifice was not like the animal sacrifices that went on day after day, but this sacrifice was once for all.<sup>5</sup> The ceremonies of old are being replaced with the reality of the new. He is setting Himself up as the last and final sacrifice. Jesus was perfect in every way and did not deserve to be executed. In fact, He came to save. Yet, this is God’s plan of redemption. He, who is perfect and without blemish, takes on our sin in exchange for His holiness. In exchange for our sin, Jesus gives us His righteousness so that we may stand in front of our Father in heaven. This is the mystery and grace of Christianity over every other religion in the entire world. Our salvation is all about grace. He takes your sins and gives you His righteousness so that you may stand tall in front of the Father, not because of what you did, but because of what Christ did for you. Christ became sin for our sake, and you must remember that you receive righteousness and holiness from Him.

In addition to Jesus identifying with mankind through His baptism, Luther also points out that Christ set Himself apart during this baptism as King. Some theologians mark this event as a coronation. Now when I think of coronations, I immediately think of trumpets and heralds yelling, “Here ye! Here ye! His royal majesty, the King!” In today’s Gospel lesson, we have something very similar occurring, yet it is also very different. In Old

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21

<sup>5</sup> Romans 6:10, Hebrews 7:27, Hebrews 9:12, Hebrews 9:26, Hebrews 10:2, Hebrews 10:10, 1 Peter 3:18

Testament times, when God spoke or made an appearance, the event was spectacular. On Mt. Sinai, thunder and lightning accompanied the presence of God and it scared the people.<sup>6</sup> However, at the baptism of Jesus, the heavens open and the Holy Spirit descends like a dove, the gentlest of all the animals, upon Jesus. In addition to the presence of the Holy Spirit, we hear from the Father as the clouds broke and He spoke from above, “this is my Son, whom I love, with whom I am well pleased”.<sup>7</sup> The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were all present at the baptism of Jesus and everyone there that day witnessed this coronation event. At His baptism, Jesus is not only preparing Himself as the sacrifice, but He is also receiving the crown from His Father. As I mentioned earlier, Luther strongly argued that the Baptism of Our Lord should be the pinnacle of the season of Epiphany. Luther specifically points to this event when he rhetorically asks if the sophists are so deeply interested in talking about three kings, they should focus their minds and preach about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit present at Christ’s baptism. We, too, should remember that if the Holy Spirit and the Father can rejoice in the humility of Jesus as He takes on our form, then we should certainly rejoice in His royalty and kingship over His people.

The last area that Luther points out concerning Jesus’ baptism is that Christ is distinguishing a mark for His people. Earlier in the year, I preached on the mark of circumcision for the Jew. Now, baptism is the new mark of the people who are truly under the King. Baptism is a seal in which Christ marks us as His own. In fact, during the baptismal ceremony, I say the words that indicate you are marked with the cross of Christ forever. At baptism, He marks you as His own. In today’s Gospel lesson, I can

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<sup>6</sup> Exodus 19:16, Exodus 20:18

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 3:17

only imagine what the people did when they heard this voice from heaven and saw the form of a dove descend upon Jesus. They must have stood in awe. Yet, this truly underscores that fact that baptism has nothing to do with the pastor or the one being baptized. Baptism has everything to do with what God does to us. During our last baptism at Lighthouse, I poured the water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet, God did everything. It was all His work. Essentially, God declared that the one baptized is His and marked with His seal. The baptized live in His kingdom as His chosen people. In addition, although the pouring of water occurred only once, Luther points out that this is not a one-time event to be forgotten. Luther explained that baptism is a daily event. The symbolism of full body immersion points to a drowning and rebirth into new life. You are a new creature and that is important to know. Luther explained that followers of Jesus should look upon their baptism every morning when they wake by making the sign of the cross and reciting the Lord's Prayer. For Lutherans, the sign of the cross is a remembrance of your baptism and the fact that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has claimed you. You die, but through Jesus Christ, you live again. You are reborn. When I think about the mark, or seal, of Christ, I cannot help to think of a wedding ring. My wedding ring says to my wife, "I am yours. I belong to you". She has a ring on as well and her ring says to me, "I am your wife. I belong to you." She belongs to me. We belong together. We are one – inseparable. This is the exact analogy that Christ has in identifying us because He is the bridegroom. The Church is His bride. Jesus has marked us and claimed us and, through baptism, said "You are mine. You belong to me". Similarly to a wedding, this mark lasts forever and is inseparable. You

cannot break it. It is a good thing to desire the mark and seal of your King and husband in Jesus Christ.

As Luther wrote so many years ago, baptism is more than water. If that is all you think baptism is – just mere water, you are missing the whole point. Baptism is a seal made by our Lord. Baptism says that you are Christ's. Christ sacrifices His life to save you from death. Christ is your King who will protect you from all harm. What does He expect from His bride? It is up to us to remember that when we walk down the street, people need to know who we belong to. When we act like the rest of the world, in other words, not like a Christian, then we are not wearing the seal properly. Wear your mark with pride. Let the world know that Jesus is your King and you are His servant. Amen.

# SERMON OUTLINE

## INTRODUCTION:

**Homiletical Point:** Your Baptism was more than mere water, it was God making you as His very own.

1. Christ identifies Himself with mankind in His Baptism by John in the Jordan.

**Explain:** Baptism was for repentance and forgiveness (symbolic)  
Jesus had no sin yet became human so as to take on our sin (sacrifice)  
Beginning of His ministry (30 years old – priest: Melchizedek)  
**Illustrate:** Dirtying something – tarnishing brass; dieting – always easier to diet with someone else  
**Apply:** Since Christ became sin for your sake, you should become holy for His sake.

<sup>NIV</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:21** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2. Christ sets Himself apart as King in His Baptism by John in the Jordan.

**Explain:** Three Kings (Luther); Coronation  
Baptism is not of man  
Father's pleasure – heaven's open; dove descended; Father's soft voice (compared to Sinai)  
**Illustrate:** Coronation of a King (people around; fanfare)  
**Apply:** Since the Holy Trinity rejoices in Christ's humility, you should rejoice in His royalty.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Mark 15:32** Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

3. Christ distinguished the mark of His people in His Baptism by John in the Jordan

**Explain:** Circumcision (symbolic mark of God's people)  
Baptism – seal of faith  
Dying and raising again to life  
Do this!!  
**Illustrate:** Branding cattle; Three musketeers (fleur de lies); Ring on husband/wife  
**Apply:** Since Baptism marks the seal of His people, you should desire the seal of your King.

**CONCLUSION:** Your Baptism was more than mere water, it was God making you as His very own.

Jesus knew of His impending death; Baptism was a burial

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 6:3** Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. <sup>5</sup> If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.