

The Baptism of Our Lord - January 7th, 2018

Mark 1:4-11

“The Voice from Heaven”

I. Introduction -

A few words about Epiphany...

It's one of those words we don't use in every day conversations. Epiphany means “appearance” or “manifestation” or “revealing”. It is the post-Christmas season in which the church dwells on just who it is that has appeared among us. Throughout the Epiphany season, we will be progressively unveiling more and more about this Jesus. Today as we read of Jesus' Baptism, we hear the voice from heaven, which says, “This is my son”. At the end of the Epiphany season, we find ourselves on the Mount of Transfiguration, and again the voice declares, “This is my son.” What a wonderful way to summarize the meaning of Epiphany. By the voice of God.

The actual day of the Epiphany of our Lord, celebrated on January 6th, is also known as the Gentile Christmas, and we recall the star that brought the wise men to worship the Christ-child. We modern worshippers of the Christ would be wise men too, by recalling and appreciating his appearing. Today, we turn to Christ's Baptism...

II. A Burning Question

I think many, maybe most Christians who first read this account of Jesus' Baptism, and have a basic understanding of who Jesus is, are left with a burning question. Why is Jesus, sinless, spotless Lamb of God that he is, getting baptized? Isn't baptism for forgiveness? What's going on here? Does Jesus need to be forgiven? And for what?

Now, you and I, that's a different story. We need our baptism. We are sinners. We are born in sin, we live in sin, we love to

sin. We wallow in it like pigs in mud. We need a good washing off. So Christian baptism is a gift of God, a holy sacrament that cleanses us from the soil of our soul. We who are baptized stand clean before the Lord - pure - sinless.

Baptism for us is also more than a temporary fix. It's not like an earthly cleaning that has to be done over and over. Like brushing your teeth every morning because they don't stay minty-fresh for long. Like the endless tasks of washing dishes and washing laundry. Like parents doing the daily picking up after the kids from school. NO! Baptism is entirely different.

Baptism is a **“washing of rebirth and renewal”**. When Jesus speaks to Nicodemus, he says baptism is being **“born again”**. So we who are baptized - ARE BAPTIZED. It is an action of God which recreates us to be something entirely different than the sinners we once were. And day after day, we return to those baptismal waters - reminding ourselves of God's promise and his love and our status as his beloved children. We are free from sin, by God's grace, given in this precious way.

But that still doesn't answer why Jesus got baptized. One clue is in Matthew's Gospel, where John protests - “I need to be baptized by YOU, Jesus!” But Jesus answers that it is fitting to do so now, “in order to fulfil all righteousness”. And here is the key.

Righteousness comes to us only through the work of Christ as our saviour. He wins it for us, as well we know, at the Cross - where he died for our sins. This was important! But also important was Jesus living the perfect life for us. In fact, if at the cross he dies in our place, everything that leads up to the cross is Jesus “living in our place”. He “fulfils all righteousness” by standing in the place of sinners. Here now, he publicly identifies with us sinners, by standing in our place - in the baptismal waters of the Jordan.

And as much as our baptism takes our sins away, Jesus' baptism does for him quite the opposite. He, the sinless Lamb of God, takes on our sin - and will carry it, eventually, to the cross. Jesus' Baptism - such an important event - is the first step, in a way, toward Calvary.

III. A Trinitarian Event

Another indicator of this event's great significance is the glaring presence of God in all his Triune fullness. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all come together in a profound way here. Jesus, of course, the voice of the Father, as well as the descent of the Spirit.

Few other times in scripture do we have such a clear picture of the Triune God. Surely at Creation, where the Father speaks, the Pre-incarnate Word (that is the son) also has a hand (**John says, "Through him all things were made"**). And the Spirit too is present, moving over the waters, and bringing life to Adam's cold clay.

Also in the final chapters of our Bible, where John's Revelation reveals a picture of the heavenly throne - with God the Father seated, Christ the Lamb at the centre of the throne, and the Holy Spirit also symbolically present in the 7 lamp-stands.

What an event that brings the Triune God into such focus - But Christ's baptism also means creation and it also means heaven for his people. For as we are baptized, we receive the three-fold name of our three-in-one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And we become a new creation. And we become heirs of heaven. It's all connected.

IV. A Voice from Heaven

One thing here that should not escape us is the voice that speaks from heaven is a kindly voice of the Father. If it were not for Christ, we couldn't expect such a thing.

Either we would hear the voice of God's wrath - the voice of a God who was angry with our sin. The voice of judgment. The voice of punishment. Or we would hear a deafening silence from a God who wants nothing to do with sin. God would forsake us, exile us from his presence, the just desserts for our wickedness.

But the Father's voice does speak. In Christ, we can hear it. And it is a voice of love. **"You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased"**. That's great for Jesus - but what about us? In Christ, that voice is for us too. God was speaking to his son, but he was also speaking to you and me. Remember Christ stands as our representative, and what he receives he passes on to us. So that in our Baptism, the voice from heaven says to us, "You are my son. You are my daughter. I love you. With you I am pleased!" Not because of us, but because of Christ!

And heaven is opened. Torn open, Mark says. Dramatically open. Like the temple curtain that was shredded on Good Friday, Christ tears open the barrier between heaven and earth, between God and man. He does demolition on the devil's dreaded kingdom. And in his tomb that was burst open at his resurrection, he even rips apart death itself. He restores and forgives, recreates and cleanses. He makes us God's beloved children.

As this Epiphany season begins, think again on what it all means that the God of Heaven was born as a man. That Jesus Christ has appeared to us, and as one of us. Sinless, yet taking on our sin. And as we unpack the meaning of it all, we see more and more the grace and love of God for us sinners. That in Christ, heaven is opened, our sins are washed away, and the kindly voice of God speaks loving words to us. In Jesus Name.

At Jesus' Baptism, God speaks! His words apply to His Son, and through Jesus, to us as well. Because of Christ, God is well pleased with us!

Amen.