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The Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord
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Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Rom 6:1-11; Mt 3:13-17

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Heavenly Father, forgive me; I got drunk three times last week.
Dear God, I've been living with my boyfriend, and I can't get out of it.
Lord, forgive my lustful eye and my lack of self-control.
God, I think I'm addicted—help!
I'm sorry for all of this; I ask for grace. I want to do better.

Those are the sorts of things John heard at the Jordan's bank.

One after another—sinners confessing and seeking the new life promised in Baptism.
Nothing would've rattled John.
You couldn't say something he hadn't heard before.
And for those gathered at the river, no one held back—
 no half-confessions or made-up sins.
 It was brutal honesty, draped in shame and remorse.
They recognized their sin and pleaded to God for mercy.

And onto each John poured the water,
 baptizing them into repentance, for the forgiveness of their sins.

But then something was different.
This man—who looked like all the others, standing *with* all the others—was different.
John knew it right away!
 “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” (Mt 3:14)

This isn't right—you're not supposed to be here!
Jesus, this Baptism isn't for you!
It's for sinners only.
You don't *need* it.

Now, John's right, here.
Jesus doesn't need to be baptized.
He has no sin, which is the only real qualification for Baptism.
Baptism is for the forgiveness of sin, and if you haven't got any, what's the point?

But the Christ also didn't need to become man, did He?
He didn't need to die or rise.
He didn't even have to create the world or anything in it.
He could have, I suppose, remained in heaven without ever humiliating Himself.
He didn't need to get into the muck and filth of the Jordan.
He didn't need to heal the sick or cleanse the lepers or raise the dead.
Jesus didn't need to stand in that long line of sinners, waiting for the waters of forgiveness.
But He did.
Why?

God never acts out of necessity.
 He's never done something because He *had* to.
 He's never been coerced by someone else.
 He's never been stuck in a bind, or with His back up against a deadline.
 God always, at every time and in every place, acts freely—according to His gracious will.
 And so it is for the Baptism of Jesus.
 For no other reason, we could say that Jesus was baptized *because He wanted to be*.

We're running down the wrong track if we're trying to figure out why Jesus *had* to be baptized.
 He didn't.
 And yet, *for us*, He was.
 He responds to John,
 “*Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*” (Mt 3:15)

That's enough for John—he consented and the water went over.

What happens next is the reason we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord in Epiphany.
 In fact, for the Eastern Orthodox Christians, Epiphany *is* the Baptism of Christ;
 they call it *Theophany*.

Theophany simply means the manifestation of God.
 It's a more precise Epiphany:
 not just an “*a ha!*”, but an “*a ha!*” about who God is!
 And better yet, an “*a ha!*” about who God is *for us!*

So what happens?
 Well, “*immediately, when Jesus went up from the water, behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest upon Him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased.'*” (Mt 3:16-17)

That's a *theophany!*
 It's a revelation, a manifestation of who God is: *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*—
 and it's all revealed at Baptism.

And here's what you need to take home today: *what goes for Jesus, goes for you*.

That's St. Paul's point in our reading from Romans.
 “*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. 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.*” (Rom 6:3-5)

What goes for Jesus—death and resurrection—
 goes for all who have been united to Him by Baptism.

And that means you.

It's really quite amazing all that happens in Baptism.
 The Holy Spirit rests upon us, making our bodies His temple.
 The Heavenly Father declares from heaven that we are His beloved Son;
 with *us* He is well pleased.

Here we're united with Christ, joined to His Body, baptized *into Him*.
 Whatever is *His* becomes *ours* in baptism; and whatever is *ours* becomes *His*.
 Here He begins His work of taking our sins to Himself;
 and giving to us the inheritance that is His.
 Luther called it the *great exchange*—begun at Baptism and fulfilled at the cross.

In Baptism we truly are saved; or, as St. Peter puts it, "*Baptism now saves you.*" (1 Pet 3:21)
 And yet how often do we take our baptism for granted?
 How many people do we know that were baptized, but look nothing like a Christian?
 Who have fallen away—or, sadly, run away.

We tend to look at Baptism as if it's a nice start—a dedication of sorts.
 But when it comes down to it, we don't really think it does anything at all.
 What matters, we think, is what follows—the life, the decision, the heart.

Now, we certainly don't want to say that what comes after is unimportant.
 St. Paul says, "*What shall we say then?*
Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?
By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom 6:1-2)

And yet, the life of repentance that follows is a life united to Christ in Baptism—
 as St. Paul says, it's *walking in the newness of life* (Rom 6:4), which comes at the font.

Every word of absolution, that is forgiveness, points us back to what God said of us in Baptism.
 Every service beginning *in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* reminds us of Baptism.
 Every sign of the holy cross is again a remembrance of what God has done for us in Baptism.

You can't overestimate your baptism.
 Because what goes for Jesus goes for you.
 Baptism is God's work, not yours.
 He opens the heavens, He sends His Spirit, He declares before all that you are His.
 And in Christ, He's yours.

"So," St. Paul says, in baptism,
 "*you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*" (Rom 6:11)
In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit