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The Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord  
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Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita  
Luke 3:15-22

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

Nikki's family thinks my feet are gross.

In my stocking years ago her mother put a foot file, or something like that.

Some people suffer from what is called "podophobia" – the irrational fear of feet.

For them, they're not just gross, they're scary.

Feet are the lowest of the low—

literally, nothing's lower on our body than a foot.

We constantly tell Micah not to put his shoes in his mouth.

And we tell our girls not to balance their shoes on their heads.

The bottom of shoes, which cover the feet, are also gross.

Think of all the things you step in—

that's why you don't put your feet on the kitchen table!

Feet are closest to the ground, closest to the dirt, and in that sense, closest to death itself.

But in today's Gospel,

while all the people are wondering in their hearts whether John is the Christ,  
the Baptizer says that he's lower than feet:

**"I baptize you with water, but He who is mightier than I is coming,  
*the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.*"** (Lk 3:16)

John isn't worthy to touch the feet, or even the shoes of Christ.

And if Jesus is right when He says,

**"Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater  
than John the Baptist"** (Mt 11:11),  
what does this say of *you*?

If you look around at our society today,

and if you stop and look into your own heart while you're at it,  
you'll find that no one really believes this.

An article was published last week entitled:

*"How college students think they are more special than EVER:  
Study reveals rocketing sense of entitlement on U.S. campuses."*

(You can hear about it on IssuesEtc., which our church now supports.)

This article revealed that we live in the most narcissistic culture yet.

"Narcissism is defined as excessive self-love or vanity;  
self-admiration, or being self-centered."

(That is, we think we are better than feet.)

It's based on some research done on college campuses among freshmen.  
 Since the mid 1960s, when this survey began, American youth increasingly see themselves as  
 smarter, prettier, more self-directed and better gifted than any generation before.

Much of this, it's argued, is due to the self-esteem movement.  
 That is, the thought that we need to raise kids' self-esteem at all times and at all costs.  
 They must never think themselves below average.

The theory was that if we could get kids to think they could do anything, maybe they would!  
 But research shows this to be a failed experiment.

There's "*a disconnect between the student's opinions of themselves and actual ability.*"<sup>1</sup>  
 Self-esteem is higher, but their writing and speaking is incredibly worse!

And as a consequence, the article says,  
 "*These young egotists can grow up to be depressed adults.*"

What does this mean for us?

It means that if you think you're better than stinky, smelly, dirty, ugly feet—  
 you're bound for disappointment!  
 It's a bit of a reality check.

John was right.  
 Humility is not only a good attribute,  
 it's the true state of things—  
 we're not as good as we imagine ourselves to be;  
 not even worthy to untie the straps of Christ's sandals.

So what will break us from our pattern of narcissism?  
 What will save us from our self-centered, egotistical, better-than-foot cultural indoctrination?

The Baptism of Jesus.

Luke says, "**Now when all the people were baptized,  
 and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying,  
 the heavens were opened,  
 and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form, like a dove;  
 and a voice came from heaven,  
 'You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.'**" (Lk 3:21-22)

In the midst of a narcissistic people,  
 with a tetrarch who imprisons and ultimately lops off the head of anyone who says  
 he can't do what he wants,  
 Jesus comes and stands in line with the rest of them.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2257715/Study-shows-college-students-think-theyre-special--read-write-barely-study.html#ixzz2Hab6qKoE>.

In Luke's Gospel, there's no fanfare,  
 no bony finger pointing to *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (Jn 1:29),  
 and no discussion of who ought to be baptizing whom (Mt 3:14-15).  
 Grammatically, Jesus being baptized isn't even the main verb in the sentence—it's a participle.

Now, if anyone has a right to narcissism—  
 that is, having excessive self-love or vanity; self-admiration, or being self-centered”—  
 it's Jesus!

He's God, you know!  
 He is the Word that created the heavens and the earth.  
 He is the Judge, who sits upon His throne and sees the thoughts and hearts of man.

When He speaks, things happen.  
 At His word the storms cease, the devils flee, the lame walk, the sick are made well,  
 and the dead are raised.

He *can't* think too highly of Himself.

But here He is, standing foot-to-foot with *you*.

Jesus stands as one of you.  
 He waits in line with those who think they're better than they are.  
 He listens to their gossip about so-and-so, and all their problems.  
 He sees the way they look in the mirror and see someone completely different.

But here, lowly and humble; He doesn't say a word.

The way to defeat narcissism, isn't to stand over someone and force it out.  
 The way to change the heart, isn't to proscribe a list of things to do.  
 The way to turn the attitude and the decisions of the soul isn't by the law.  
 That will not heal; it kills.

The only hope is for Jesus to get in the water,  
 to enter the muck and grime and filth of your sin, and to let it cover Himself.  
 It's for Him to enter your darkness, your self-love, your gossip, your fear.  
 And rather than letting it all come crashing down on you,  
 rather than letting the darkness swallow you up, or the depression drown you out,  
 He lets it all die and drown in Him.

The solution to your sin cannot be found in anything you do or say or think.  
 It comes only by what this baptized and crucified Jesus does for you.

And John is right:

**“He who is mightier than I is coming...  
 He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”** (Lk 3:16)

He has baptized you.  
He has opened the heavens to you.  
He has given you His Holy Spirit.  
You are His beloved Son.  
With You He is well pleased.

So don't be so narcissistic.  
Don't be so pleased with yourself that you forget that in Christ,  
God Himself is well-pleased with you.

That's Baptism—  
Christ's Baptism and yours,  
and for your children and their children afterwards.

There you're joined to Christ and He to you.  
There is your worth and your greatness.

In those waters you're finally pulled out from your self-love and despair,  
and you're put in Christ.

And truly, there's no better place to be.

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