

Quinquagesima - Baptism of Jesus - Matthew 3:13-17

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Matthew 3:13-17

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John at the Jordan. ¹⁴But John tried to stop him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?"

¹⁵But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, because it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then John let him. ¹⁶After Jesus was baptized, he immediately went up out of the water. Suddenly, the heavens were opened for him! He saw the Spirit of God, descending like a dove and landing on him, ¹⁷and a voice out of the heavens said, "This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him."

You Were Are Baptized

A Baptism is a wonderful event. For a Christian, it truly is the most important day of their life, because the person or child is receiving through the water and God's Word the promise of the forgiveness of their sins, eternal life, and salvation. It's the new birth into God's family. And what amazing gifts God gives on this new birth day: forgiveness, life, and salvation. Those legos or dolls you got on your physical birthday are pretty insignificant in comparison. Baptism is the start of a Christian's new life. It's a monumental and joyous thing.

But what happens after? We don't often think about what happens after do we? Most of us probably don't even remember what day we were baptized. Maybe the baptismal certificate probably was shoved in a drawer long ago, forgotten about. If we really knew what baptism was and what it did, would we forget about it so quickly?

Imagine you're playing a video game, and your character or avatar is about to enter into a war zone. As you walk through the gate, your character is given a load of weapons. It would be a pretty dumb thing to think "I don't need these" and get rid of them. Your character would be dead in a matter of seconds.

But despite that happy occasion, baptism is like that too. After Baptism, that Christian is now entering a war zone. He or she is the target of the Devil's temptations. Before their baptism, they were dead in their sins, and the Devil didn't have to work very hard. He already had them. But after, that cross marked on the person's forehead becomes the target for the Devil to remove.

Shaking off your baptism as something you don't need would be the most foolish thing you could do. You would very quickly be spiritually dead. One pastor I know once said that when they baptized someone, as they spoke God's Word and poured the water onto the forehead with one hand, with the other hand, they imagined that they were opening a cage and releasing the Devil.

The Devil wants nothing more than to stop Jesus' saving work, and to steal Christians away from Christ. So he has to work hardest on Christians.

But this is why Baptism isn't just an event that happened in the past. It's not something you decided to do, it's not something you needed to do to make God happy. Baptism is a reality. You weren't just baptized long ago. You **are** baptized. God Himself worked through the water and the Word to bring you to faith in Baptism. And God brings you back to it everytime you hear the Gospel and receive the forgiveness of your sins. You live in baptism.

Our account today shows us what amazing things God does in our baptism at Jesus' Baptism.

Jesus goes to John the Baptist at the Jordan river to be baptized. John is offering a baptism of repentance and forgiveness. But you only need repentance if you sin, and unfortunately, that means each and every single one of us needs repentance, because we are all sinners. John knew very well that he needed repentance and absolution as much as any of the people to whom he was preaching to, which includes even us. But he also knows that there is one person who does not need to be baptized, and it's Jesus. *"I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"*

We are poor, miserable sinners, and with our sins and iniquities we have offended God. We are by nature sinful and unclean, sinning against God by thought, word, and deed.

Jesus, however, is by nature God. Perfect, holy, righteous. But He goes to an imperfect sinner to be baptized. John was right - Jesus did not need to be baptized. But Jesus isn't going to be baptized for Himself. He is going to be baptized *for us*.

Now, we need to understand something about consecration in the Old Testament. Prophets, priests, and kings all were consecrated. God ordained a specific ceremony for priests by which men in the Old Testament would become or be consecrated as priests. The ceremony involved the sacrifice of a Lamb, along with unleavened bread and wine. The man is anointed and then there is a laying on of hands by other priests. Then he would be sprinkled with blood and finally, he is washed with water.

Jesus' baptism is His consecration. He's washed with water, and God the Holy Spirit lands on Him. It was the ultimate laying on of hands. Jesus is consecrated as our Prophet, Priest, and King.

First, Jesus is consecrated as Prophet. A prophet teaches. Specifically, Old Testament prophets would prophesy, they would point forward to Jesus. Jesus as prophet doesn't point anywhere but to Himself. From His Baptism, Jesus begins His preaching office. Over the next three years, Jesus would go around teaching the truth, mighty in Word and deed. From His Baptism, Jesus reveals the truth, He proclaims God's powerful, life-giving Word.

Second, Jesus is consecrated as our priest. Jesus had no sin, but became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). The Righteous One has stepped in among sinners. Imagine you went to a pool but before getting in, you look at the water and it's just filthy, and you know that if you get in, you'll be covered in it. Jesus steps into the water, but as He's stepping into it, He's stepping into our filth and sin, and He's letting it cling to Him. But then He gets out with it, and the water is clean, and who are in it are clean. Jesus, as Priest, sanctifies the waters of our Baptism. He makes Baptism count for us.

As Jesus was coming to be Baptized, John the Baptist saw Him and proclaimed, "Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). From Jesus' Baptism on, Jesus begins the way of sorrow. He begins the difficult path to the cross. In fact, the very next thing that happens in Jesus' life after He is Baptized, is His temptation by the Devil in the wilderness. This is our Gospel lesson for next week, the first Sunday in Lent. The Devil wants nothing more than to stop Jesus' saving work, and to steal Christians away from Christ. So

even after Jesus' baptism, Satan gets to work. But Jesus *is* baptized into our sinful condition in order to make an offering for our sin by suffering death. As Satan tries to kill Jesus, Jesus' very death is Satan's defeat.

Finally, Jesus is consecrated as King. At Jesus' Baptism, He begins His battle with the Devil. But at His resurrection, Jesus wins perfect victory over the prince of death.

At Jesus' baptism, He not only is consecrated prophet, priest, and king, but He consecrates the water - simple water - as a means of salvation for us. Christ's death and life of resurrection are in it. By *your* Baptism, you receive what He became by *His* Baptism. He is baptized into our sin, and we are baptized into his righteousness.

"As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ," Paul says in Galatians 3:27. Christ unites us to Himself in Baptism. Just as Jesus died, we are both dead *to* sin and *from* sin, and just as Jesus rose from the dead, so Baptism gives us new life as well. (Romans 6:3-4)

In Baptism, we are joined to our Priest, we have the new life from the Words of our Prophet, and we have the victory of our King.

And it's a reality. It's not a video game simulation, nor is it a one-time deal. You *are* baptized. Baptism saves you because it's Jesus at work in it joining Himself to you. Because you have been baptized into Christ, your sins can't disturb you any longer. Your guilt can't overtake you because Christ as your priest absolves you through Baptism. You have been sprinkled with Jesus' blood in Baptism.

Satan will try to come at you with all his tricks and lies, but he has nothing to accuse you of, because you are baptized into Christ. All his might comes unravelled, and against His tyranny, God your Lord and King unites Himself with you.

Even death cannot end your gladness. You are baptized into Christ. When you die, you will leave all sadness To inherit Paradise! Though you lie in dust and ashes, Faith's assurance brightly flashes: Baptism has the strength divine To make life immortal mine.

Baptism does what God says. "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).

Quinquagesima Sunday is all about "faith alone." We aren't saved by works. We cannot do anything to come to God or know Him. Baptism isn't our work, we can't come to Him, He has to come to us. And He does, just as John the Baptist proclaimed.

We are saved by faith alone. But our faith isn't alone.

You often hear people say at times of loss, "well, all you need is faith." While they may be well-meaning, that expression implies that you do something, or that you are the cause and source of your strength. But when you're facing sin, the devil, or death - and you will because you have the target of the cross on your forehead, you can't go at them alone. If you try, you will quickly be defeated. That's why you have Baptism, that's why you *are* baptized.

Faith doesn't trust in itself. Faith trusts in the promises of God. God promises forgiveness in Baptism, He promises salvation through Baptism, He promises to join you to Jesus in Baptism.

Baptism is the reality, the visible proof of God's promise to you. Faith trusts what God has done for you in Baptism. And in *your* Baptism, through *His* Baptism, Christ has taken on your sin and guilt, He's defeated the devil, and overcome death. He's given you His righteousness, forgiveness, and life.

In His death and resurrection, you are baptized into Christ. So let us gladly die and live with Jesus. Amen.