

Matthew 3:16-17

The Baptism of Our Lord (Series A)

Lessons for the Day: Isaiah 42:1-7; Roman 6:1-11; Matthew 3:13-17

The Voice from Heaven is Our Father, Too

January 12, 2020

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

One of the great blessings that God has given His people is the privilege of prayer. I know that whenever we ask for prayer requests there are many who eagerly ask for prayers for their needs and for the needs of others, as we join together in seeking God's help and grace for all the things that we face in this world. I also know that for every request that is made, there are a whole host of unspoken requests that rest upon the hearts of our members, too. As much as we would like to think that we can do all things on our own, we soon realize how inadequate our own strength and wisdom truly are. We realize that we cannot deal with things by ourselves. But we never have to deal with things alone! God Himself bids us seek His help and strength for our lives. He tells us: *call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.*" (Psalm 50:15 - ESV)

As we get into this new year, I issue a call to prayer—asking that you pray regularly, faithfully and fervently for God's church in the world. I ask that you pray for Pastor Moffett and myself, and for all the pastors and deacons of the Church, that we may be faithful to our calling, and speak boldly the truth of the Christ, crucified and risen again. I urge you to pray for our leaders and teachers in this congregation. Pray for faithfulness among our members. Pray for our children and youth and their growth in the Lord. Pray for the financial needs of our congregation. Pray for those who do not know the blessings of forgiveness and life in Jesus Christ. Pray to the Lord of all, who promises to hear and answer His people.

My dear people, loved of God, we need to pray, especially when we see the things that are happening in the world, such as the tensions between the US and Iran that seemed to have resulted in shooting down a civilian airliner. We need to pray when we see how our world continues to turn further and further from the truth of God, so that even many so-called Christian churches do not proclaim the truth of sin, and of the grace of God, made known to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If we are not proclaiming the whole council of God, then people begin to think that they can save themselves—or that they don't need a Saviour. The devil has convinced so many that God doesn't matter. In the face of this we need to pray, and we need to pray as never before. Thankfully, we have God's promise here, too: *if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.* (2 Chronicles 7:14 - ESV)

Today, on this first Sunday after the Epiphany, we remember the Baptism of our Lord. And if you are wondering what our celebration of Christ's baptism has to do with a call to prayer, let me assure you that they are firmly linked together. As Jesus came up out of the Jordan, we are told: *behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* The great miracle of God's grace, bestowed upon us in Baptism is this: that we, who have been baptized into Christ, and into His death and resurrection, also know that the Father, who spoke from heaven at Jesus' baptism, spoke the same words of love at our baptism. When we are baptized, God said, "You are now my beloved son, or my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased." We can call God our Father, for He has brought us into His family through our baptism into Christ.

This is where the link between Baptism and prayer are found. In our Baptism God declares He is our Father. When Jesus taught the disciples to pray, giving them the Lord's Prayer, the first thing He taught them was: *Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*" (Matthew 6:9 - ESV) In the Small Catechism, Luther reminds us: *With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.* (SC, Lord's Prayer, Introduction) Paul even tells us that when we pray, we can call Him *Abba*, the more personal term that a child would use to address his own dear father. (Romans 8:15). When we pray, we are praying to a loving Father; the Father who has marked us as His own; the Father who says, "you are my beloved child"; the Father who wants to hear the concerns of His children.

Yet, what right do we have to call God our Father? How quickly we go off on our own, with no regard for the Father's love

for us. We do not respect Him nor honour Him as father. We do our own thing; we live as if God does not matter. Day by day, we break His commandments through our lustful thoughts, our hurtful words, and our disregard of Him. The people of Israel told Jesus: ***“We have one Father—even God.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires.*** (John 8:41-44 - ESV) That’s true for us, too. We don’t live as the children of God. Our actions, our thoughts and our attitudes all declare that we are doing the will of the wrong father, the devil. We all need to get to the same point as the prodigal son did, where we can recognize our sin and confess: ***‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’*** (Luke 15:21 - ESV)

God doesn’t want us lost to the eternal death and torment of hell, outside of His family of grace and life. But we are lost, unless He Himself brings us back into His family. That’s why Christ comes to be one with us in human flesh and blood. He comes to redeem us, as He takes His place beside sinners like you and me. When the sinless Son of God came to the Jordan River, He did not come with any sin that He needed to confess. Rather, He comes to take upon Himself all the guilt and shame of our lives, and, in view of His cross, to wipe them out as He washes them away in His own holy baptism.

That is only the beginning of the story. When John had finished the baptism and Jesus came out of the water, the heavens opened above Jesus, and the Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove, and the Father’s voice spoke from heaven: ***“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*** If there was any doubt as to who Jesus was, it is removed in this one brief sentence, spoken by the Father Himself. Jesus truly is the Son of God. God Himself has said so. God has declared His great love for His Son. But more than that, the Father declares that everything His Son has done is pleasing to Him. He is pleased to have chosen Him as the Redeemer of the world. He is pleased to give Him to us that we might be saved through Him. And the Father announces His good pleasure in His Son to those who gathered at the Jordan - to John and to all the people of Jerusalem: ***“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”***

Those wonderful words which bear witness to the greater glory of our Lord Jesus Christ are spoken again at the Transfiguration. But in a very real sense God speaks those words at the Baptism of all His children. Many people think of Baptism as something the church does; just the sprinkling of water on a baby to symbolize that God loves him. But Baptism is a very special gift of God. In Baptism, God works a great miracle, as He unites us with Christ in His death and resurrection, and makes us partakers of it. St. Paul says: ***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.*** (Romans 6:4 - ESV) Through the water and the word, working together at the command of God, Baptism forgives sin, delivers us from death and the devil, and gives us eternal life. St. Paul speaks of Baptism as ***the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,*** (Titus 3:5 - ESV) It is a washing that cleanses away all the sin and shame which separates us from God.

As God washes away our sin, He also declares that we are His very dear children. Maybe the ears don't hear what the heart can hear, but in every baptism the same voice which spoke from heaven at the Baptism of Jesus speaks to us, too and says: You are My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased. In our Baptism God says to us: ***“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.*** (Isaiah 43:1 - ESV) What a glorious promise this is! God has called you by name. He has made you an heir of His salvation. He is pleased to call you His child. He loves you. And in place of the eternal death that waited for us, God has given us everlasting life with Him in heaven. When the Father spoke from heaven at the Baptism of Jesus, He declared that Jesus was His Son, the one chosen to be our Saviour. In our Baptism, God speaks to us, calls us His children, and assures us of a wonderful new life that is ours through faith in His anointed Saviour.

Again, here’s the connection between our Baptism and prayer. In our baptism, we are united with Christ, who united Himself with us in His baptism, We are the children of God. He is our Father. That is why ***with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.*** We have needs, and the Father says: ***“and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”*** (Psalm 50:15, ESV) We never have to fear that our prayers are falling on deaf ears. We are coming to the Father, who has redeemed us as His own through the cross of His own dear Son. We are praying to the One who gives us life in His home of heaven through the Son, who rose again from the dead. We are praying to the Father in heaven, who spoke at the baptism of Christ, and who speaks to us through our Baptism, to assure us of His grace. God is your father. Through faith in Christ, you are His child. In that confidence, I again call you to pray for our church, its people and the needs around us. Pray, for our God will answer, and He will always do what is good for us. After all, we are so precious to Him, that He even gave His Son to bring us into His eternal kingdom. Amen.