

Sermon for the Baptism of Our Lord “God’s Pleasure in His Son, Our Savior”

Luke 3:15-22

1/13/19c

¹⁵ Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, ¹⁶ John answered, saying to all, “I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.”

¹⁸ And with many other exhortations he preached to the people. ¹⁹ But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, ²⁰ also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison.

²¹ When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. ²² And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.”

Exegetical Statement: It has now come to pass that Jesus, the Holy One born to Mary in accordance with the announcement of the angel, is a grown man. John, son born to Elizabeth and Zechariah, is also a grown man and has begun to proclaim a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is baptized by John, not because He Himself is a sinful man, but for other reasons relating to His saving mission for mankind. At Jesus’ baptism a remarkable and unique sign from heaven appears: the heaven is opened, the Spirit comes upon Jesus in bodily form, like a dove, and the Father Almighty speaks, audibly voicing His love and pleasure in Jesus, whom He affirms to be His Son.

Focus Statement: God’s comforting Word for us is that His good pleasure in His incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, is that Jesus became flesh to redeem us through His cross.

Function Statement: That the hearers, in repentant faith, believe in and give thanks for God’s incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, who became flesh to rescue us from sin, death, and Satan into God’s good pleasure forevermore.

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The text is today’s Holy Gospel, especially Luke 3:21-22:

²¹ When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. ²² And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This day of Christian celebration and joy is called the Baptism of Our Lord. Today's Holy Gospel, as just heard again, relates the time when our Lord, Jesus Christ, was baptized by John in the Jordan River. Like so many other events in Jesus' life, this event, after it has been heard many times, can seem familiar and old and pale. But in fact this event is one of tremendous significance. It is the first of the events of Jesus' adult life which any of the evangelists relate. It indeed marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. And this event of Jesus' Baptism stands out all the more because of the signs that accompanied it. While Jesus was praying, we learn that three great things happened: the heaven was opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon the body of our Lord, swooping down in the form of a dove, and the voice of Jesus' eternal Father spoke, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." There would be no other moment in all of Jesus' earthly ministry in which God the Father and God the Holy Spirit would show themselves and express themselves in this way. A more emphatic affirmation of and sure stamp of approval upon the incarnate Son of God one can hardly imagine.

So the Baptism of Our Lord is a great and most significant event. We rightly celebrate it. Yet, if we are honest, a close look and careful consideration of this event can also be unsettling.

You and I this morning, as we hear this Word from Scripture and ponder it, you and I can feel today a little bit like the siblings of the model son, that brother who is always receiving commendation from his parents. "Son, we are proud of you, your recital was excellent." "Son, you did it again, you won the game for your team; well done!" "Son, you hold yourself so well and look so confident and handsome; you are a treasure." "Son, we love you, you show us such honor every day." "Son, you are so intelligent and do so well in school; your mother and father are amazed and proud!"

And we, as the siblings of such a “perfect” big brother, will naturally wonder, What about me? Does Mom love me like she loves him? Is Dad proud of me too? Could I ever measure up to all that my brother is?

Pondering the Baptism of Our Lord can make us feel this way, I say, because there at Jesus’ Baptism we heard that voice, the voice of the eternal Father and God of all, and what did the voice say? “...My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased” (v.22). The Father said He was well pleased. And He said that about Jesus, His Son from eternity, now also a man just like us. The Father said how “pleased” He was in that man, Jesus. And pleased He was, because in His humanity Jesus had conformed in every way to God’s design, intention, and will. Jesus had lived righteously—not only outwardly (as we sometimes do), but inwardly (as we seldom do). Jesus had kept the Ten Commandments from a merry and obedient heart. Here was a man who was what men should be: holy, perfect, good.

If such a man pleases the Father, what about me? If I am honest, and hold the mirror of the Ten Commandments near my heart, then not for a moment could I begin to claim that I have been holy, perfect, and good. But like King David, whose “sin is ever before me” (Ps. 51:3), I am a man burdened and bowed down by my sins. And so are you: “For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Sin is serious to God. Psalm 5:4 says: “For You are not a God who delights in wickedness.” Truly, God has no pleasure—none at all—in our rebellion against Him.

And so, as we hear this morning of God’s pleasure in His Son, this is painful and frightful to us, to the extent that it causes us to think about how *displeased* God must be with us, as we stumble through this life He has given us with so much sin on a constant basis—*my sin, my guilt, my fault*.

Yet we must learn to see and understand this: for what *purpose* was God’s Son made human? To what end was His good living, His

rendering obedience to the Law? Was it indeed to make me feel my shortcoming and my failure, and to despair about this? Is there any clue for me about the purpose of the incarnation in the fact that this Jesus—perfect, holy, sinless Jesus—was baptized that day? Let us remember that the dove, the voice, these were not just given out of the blue, but in conjunction with Jesus being baptized. That He was baptized is most significant. Now surely, Jesus for His own sake needed no Baptism, for He needed no repentance and He needed no forgiveness. Then why this Baptism? (God does not do things for no reason, and never makes mistakes.) Why Christ’s Baptism?

It was because Jesus was already then beginning to stand in for sinners—yes, to take on the sin and guilt of sinners. As my new pastoral desk diary very vividly states it, “Now Jesus steps down into baptismal waters so He can soak up the sins of the world” (p. 41).

And if you think such a thing could not be true, then trace (as we will in the coming months) Jesus’ subsequent path. From His Baptism did Jesus ascend back to heaven? Oh, no. He went in one direction—to the cross. If a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins seems out of place for One like Jesus, how much more out of place the cross. Yet the incarnate Son of God went there, to the cross, to die and bear the curse. For God’s Son truly came to be the Savior of people just like us.

You see, the Father’s good pleasure was not alone in the life Jesus had lived—a life in accord with the Law, from the heart. The Father’s good pleasure was also in Jesus’ acceptance of the divine mission, to save sinners by bearing their sin, by “dying to sin once for all” (Rom. 6:10), through His death as our sacrificial Lamb and substitute, removing our guilt and damnation.

Jesus’ being baptized, then, was part of that firm pledge to carry out His Father’s will to redeem us all. You, then, far from being frightened and discouraged by the words of the Father and the anointing by the Spirit, should learn to be quieted and heartened, comforted and encouraged by

these things. For this good and holy Man is yours, given by God Almighty to you and for you, to be embraced by faith. Indeed, God has provided the Baptism that is for *you* to receive, in which by water and God's word you are joined to Jesus. And if you are joined to Jesus by faith, then the Father's pleasure in His Son is also the Father's pleasure in you. Despite your sin, you can lift your head high, trusting that saving name of Jesus. You are the beloved child of God the Father, through His grace and mercy in His Son. You are the ones in whom the Father is well pleased.

So let us celebrate and give thanks to the triune God on this most holy day.

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

Amen.