

“What If You Can’t?”

Baptism of Our Lord - series c

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

January 10, 2010

For some people, baptism is “just joining the Jesus club.” Everyone knows what it means to join a club such as Girls Scouts or Boy Scouts, Funsters, the Legion, Rod and Gun Club. Most of you have joined clubs and every club has its rules and regulations. For some people Baptism is joining the ‘Jesus club’ and when you do you have to follow the “Jesus rules.”

For others, baptism is like “hell insurance.” Grandma Prudence insists that her grand daughter be baptized because the family is going on a vacation. Grandma doesn’t want to have that baby get killed in a car accident and end up going to hell. The baptismal certificate becomes a “hell insurance card” to certify that the child goes to heaven.

Others, avoid baptizing their children so that when they’re old enough they can make up their own minds about what’s good for them and what isn’t without mom and dad force feeding them. Never-the-less mom and dad make sure that the kids learn to eat their fruits and vegetables. They don’t want them filling their tummies on a diet of junk food. Get them started eating right at an early age and they’ll eat right for life.

Today, on this observance of the Baptism of Our Lord, I would like to talk about your baptism. And I’m going to focus on Jesus’ baptism as a means of understanding your baptism.

As Luke tells the story, Jesus came to the Jordan River, like many others, to be baptized by John. After his baptism, Jesus was praying and as he did so, the sky opened up and the Holy Spirit, like a dove, came down on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice from above declared: “You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, with you I am well pleased.”

The Holy Spirit came upon him. This was the same Spirit that was present when God created the world. In the opening verses of the Bible, it says, the Spirit of God was hovering above the waters ready to create life. Then, that same Spirit that was present at the creation of the world came upon the prophets. The prophets were filled with

God’s Spirit and they spoke messages from God with boldness and authority. That same Spirit came upon King David and to help him to rule wisely. The same powerful Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism.

As a result of having the Spirit of God within him, Jesus had unusual power to turn water into wine, to control the wind and waves at sea, to cure lepers and heal the lame the deaf and the blind. And this same Holy Spirit gave Jesus a spirit of gentleness and compassion in all his relationships. Not only that, but Jesus also had the unusual power to confront the demons, to fight the evil powers that ravaged the people around him. Immediately after his baptism, Jesus was sent by God out into the wilderness to be tempted and tested by the devil. By the power of the Spirit, Jesus stood up to the test. He demonstrated that God’s power was stronger than evil.

When you were baptized, the same Holy Spirit that descended upon Jesus, came down on you. The Spirit of God came into you and you became a member of the community of the Spirit. In this community of the Spirit, you grow in faith, love and obedience to the will of God. We are the community of the Spirit and we pray constantly, “Open up the heavens and send your Spirit upon us.”

The Holy Spirit gives you strength and power to cope with life and, more than cope, to be victorious in life. The power of the Holy Spirit is present to help you when you go through challenging times in your life, a painful divorce. ...kids who may be driving you insane... your aging parents, a serious illness, the death of one most dear to you. The Power of the Spirit is with you in your own aging and with you in your dying. With the Holy Spirit at work in you, there is spiritual power, and that is no less real than other kinds of power. No wonder the demons trembled at the sound of Jesus’ voice. The demons know that they are not as strong as the Spirit of God. When the Holy Spirit is inside of

you, you are empowered to confront the evils of this world.

Secondly, in his baptism, Jesus was **declared to be the Son of God**. The voice out of heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." I have always appreciated those words. It calls to mind my feelings about my own children and how dear they are to me. I have fond memories of Rachel running to greet me when I pulled into the garage at home. Daddeeee! She would leap into my arms. What a welcome! And Joel, the first time he got a hit in T-ball and went running as fast as he could toward first base and then kept running straight down the base line all the way past the outfield and beyond. He would have reached Dunn county if we hadn't stopped him. This is my beloved son in whom my soul delights.

As Jesus was baptized, I can imagine God in heaven, looking down at his grown child, Jesus, and saying, "This is my beloved Son." And so it is when you and I are baptized. God looks down at you and says, "This is my beloved child, the child I love." That's how God feels about you and me, whether you are eight days, eight weeks, eight months, eight years, or even eighty-eight years old. No matter, love is God's fundamental attitude toward you.

There is a third factor that happens in baptism. The voice of God identified Jesus as being the **Suffering Servant**. The quotation, "this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased," is also found in the Old Testament in Isaiah, chapter 42. Isaiah 42 is about a Suffering Servant. Now, in his baptism, Jesus is identified as being that Suffering Servant of Isaiah.

The Suffering Servant is the one who carries the sins of the whole world on his back on the cross. The burden of the cross was much more than just the physical pain of cruel torture. When Christ carried the cross to Golgotha, he bore the pain of sin, the sins of the whole world. The Suffering Servant is like a pack mule. The mule carries the load; that is their purpose and that was the purpose of Jesus. The purpose of Christ was to carry the incredibly heavy load of sin, the sin of

the whole world, on his back.

You were baptized in order to remove the heavy burden of your sin. That was not true of the baptism of Jesus. Jesus had no sins. According to the Bible, Jesus was baptized not to get rid of his sins, but in order to carry your sins and my sins and the sins of the whole world on the cross. So it is with your baptism: when you were baptized, Christ washed away the burden of your sins through his death on the cross.

I don't have to worry that my past sins, my failures, my imperfections will keep God from loving me. All the things that I have done wrong and all the things that I have failed to do right are carried by Jesus to his cross. That's what it means that Jesus is the Suffering Servant. He serves you and me by his suffering on the cross.

I love the story about a pastor who was at a downtown city mission on skid row. In order for these transients and homeless people to sleep at this mission, they had to endure a worship service and a sermon. It was part of the bargain in order to get food and shelter. The preacher that night felt he was a gifted orator and had memorized Rudyard Kipling's poem, *If*. The pastor recited the poem with great gusto:

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all others doubt
you,

But make allowance for their doubting too:
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too
wise;

If you can dream---and not make dreams your
master;

If you can think---and not make thoughts your
aim,

If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same:
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to,

broken,

And stoop and build'em up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,
And never breathe a word about your loss:

If you can force your heart and nerve and
sinew

To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold
on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your
virtue,

Or walk with Kings---nor lose the common
touch,

If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all people count with you, but none too
much:

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,

And---which is more---you'll be a Man, my
son!

As the pastor recited this poem the "thespian" in him became choked with emotion. He was on the edge of tears, and was filled with deep feelings. There was a long silent pause. During that silent pause, a voice from the back of the room piped up, "What if you can't?"

Good question. Great question. "What if you can't?" What if you can't master your dreams? What if you can't meet triumph and disaster just the same? What if you lose your head when everybody else around you is keeping theirs? What if you can't trust yourself? What if you can't wait? What if you're tired of waiting? What if you are a lousy parent? What if you're in a failing marriage? What then?

Then you hear again the assurance that you've been baptized. You hear again that all of your

failures and imperfections, guilt and shame have been loaded onto the back of Christ, that pack mule, that suffering servant who carried the burden of your sin on the cross long before you were even born.

Baptism? Baptism is just a cute ritual done in church, the sprinkling of water on a baby's head. For others Baptism is hell insurance and protects that little one from going to hell. And for still others Baptism is joining the Jesus Club with all its rules and regulations.

What happened in Jesus' baptism? The Spirit of God came upon Jesus. He was declared to be the beloved Son of God, anointed to be the Suffering Servant who bears the sin of the whole world on his cross.

Let us pray:

God our Father, You have baptized us and implanted your Holy Spirit within us. You have called us by name and we are yours: You have declared that we are precious in your sight. Grant that we may daily lay claim to these gifts of grace, living life anew by walking in the footsteps of Jesus your Son. Your voice, O God, is a powerful voice. Guide the leaders of our nation and the world with your power and wisdom, that they may serve your purpose of compassion for all.

10:30 Your Holy Spirit has descended this day upon Cameron Sears. Your voice has proclaimed from heaven that he is your beloved child. May he grow to be a disciple of Jesus.

You have created and formed every human being for your glory: Hear our prayers on behalf of (Joel Schulze who underwent knee replacement surgery on Friday _____ and) all those whose names appear on our prayer concern list as well as those we name in the silence of our hearts. We praise you and thank you for the healing and renewed life that so many have received by your mercy and grace.

Lord of life and death, you gather your offspring from all directions and call them by name. receive into your heavenly glory those who

have died. Comfort those left behind with the gift of the comforter, the Holy Spirit, and grant them the peace that passes all understanding.

Sustain in hope our sisters and brothers in Malawi Africa as they recover from a devastating earthquake. Guide our Congregation Council with the light of your Spirit as they meet with our Bishop, Pastor Duane Pederson and make plans for the calling of a new Senior Pastor to this congregation.

In all these matters we place our trust in you and seek your mercies, in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen