

“Holy Baptism 101”

Isaiah **43:1-7**, Romans **6:1-11**; Luke **3:15-22**

Baptism of our Lord, January **13, 2019**

Now that the Christmas Season is over and most of the people who received gifts, **but wanted to exchange those gifts for something else, have already done so**, the checkout lines in our favorite stores are much shorter again! For which many of us say: “Praise the Lord!”

And yet when we meet our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in our Gospel Lesson (Luke 3:15-22), we see him standing, in what no doubt, was a very long line. He is in a line of people, who were part of huge crowd, awaiting to be baptized by that great forerunner of Christ, **whose coming upon the scene was prophesied in at least three different Old Testament passages, John the Baptist.**

Some of the people who had come there, voluntarily, I might add, were even wondering among themselves if this **rather wooly-looking man**, who was **clothed in camel’s hair**, with a **leather belt around his waist** and who **had not had a haircut or trimmed up his beard**, in what must have been **“A Month of Sundays;”** whether or not this man John might have been the long-awaited and Promised Messiah.

But John the Baptist answered them flat-out: “No, I am not!”

Not only does John the Baptist verbally reject any notion that he was the Promised Savior of the world, in addition to this, he points out the **SUPERIORITY OF THE SAVIOR WHO IS TO COME: “I baptize you with water, but after me comes One whose sandals I am not worthy to unstrap! He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire!”**

This was a prophecy, let’s remember, that did come true on that first Pentecost Sunday; 50 days after our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ had risen from the dead and triumphed over the grave that first Easter morning!

Here Jesus is, who for the most part, had lived out the first 30 years of his life, in relative obscurity, **now stepping forward into the Jordan River to be baptized by John, NOT FOR ANY OF HIS OWN SINS**, we must be quick to point out! For this is the Jesus of whom it is written in the fourth chapter of **HEBREWS, VERSE 15: “We have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us in our weaknesses, but one who was tempted in every way as we are, though he never sinned!”**

Jesus was willing to stand in that long line, willing to surprise his 2nd cousin John, the son of Zechariah and Elisabeth, when he submits himself before John, and steps into the river, to receive that **BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS**, because in doing so, **Jesus was identifying himself with all of us! Jesus, was thereby taking his first public step to the cross**, as the One whom St. Paul wrote about in **2 Cor. 5:21**, when he says: **“God made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, so that through him, we might become the righteousness of God!”**

Brothers and sisters, I want to tell you, that the **unifying theme in these three Scripture lessons** we have read today, is the first verse of our Old Testament Lesson taken from **Isaiah 43:1-7. “BUT NOW THUS SAYS THE LORD, HE WHO CREATED YOU, O JACOB, HE WHO FORMED YOU, O ISRAEL: FEAR NOT, FOR I HAVE REDEEMED YOU; I HAVE CALLED YOU BY NAME, YOU ARE MINE!”**

This passage from our Old Testament lesson today is the 2nd of 4 different passages in Isaiah, that theologians have classified as: **“The Servant Songs.”** The other three “Servant Songs” are written in Isaiah 42, Isaiah 49, and Isaiah 53.

This Servant Song, like the others, was written in prophecy of the coming Messiah, but they were addressed also to the people of Israel too, recently returned home from the Babylonian exile, with so many challenges before them if they were going to rebuild the temple, the city, and the walls around the city of Jerusalem.

But these words are also written to you and me, as the modern-day disciples of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Even though our relationship with our Creator had been totally broken and severed, by sin, God was going to intervene into his world to ransom us from our sins, from death and the power of the devil.

God is going to intervene into this world to **redeem us** from our sins; to **“buy us back,”** the way that a wealthy person who receives a ransom note is more than willing to pay the ransom required, if they have those assets available to them at their disposal, to **ransom or redeem a kidnapped son or a kidnapped daughter.**

These words of our OLD TESTAMENT LESSON (Isaiah 43:1-7) speaks to us about our **great God’s desire to establish a personal relationship with every one of us.** God who knows us completely, longs and desires for us to come to know him, personally and intimately ourselves. He wants us to know of the great love he has for us and for all people in the world!

That’s why God created the universe, our solar system, our planet and the plants and the animals, the sun, moon and stars. He created this beautiful world in which we might live, not only to glorify him but also to give us, what I like to call sometimes: **“A HABITAT FOR HUMANITY.”**

Can you remember, if you have children, how excited you were, as you were anticipating the birth of your first child, and how, if possible, you wanted to create the perfect nursery, with just the right kind of crib and changing table, with just the right kind of little baby-mobile that hung over the bed and a baby-lamp to set atop the dresser.

You even wanted the perfect bassinet for you own room, so that you and your child could rest completely!

This is how our God was, but to a much greater, when it came to his creating this beautiful world for us; creating our first parents and entrusting to them and humankind, dominion, and stewardship which they then, and we still today, are to exercise over this earth.

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you! I have called you by name! You are mine!” But please notice that the Lord God does not say that even for the Promised Messiah, everything would be smooth-sailing and problem-free.

God doesn't say that **you will never have to pass through any rough waters or seek to force your way across a big river** with a very strong current; like the current in the **St. John's River that is just 20 miles west of here on Highway 92.**

Quite the contrary, he does say: ***"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you! And through the rivers they will not overwhelm you!"***

Plenty of God-fearing, Christian people, have drowned in the waters of the North Atlantic Ocean on their way from Europe to North America in the 17th and 18th centuries, and in every other ocean around the world. Who can forget the **1500 men, women, and children, who drowned during the maiden voyage of the Titanic in the North Atlantic Ocean on April 15, 1912?**

Here the LORD God also says, ***"When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you!"***

Christians, the same as any other people, who were living out in California when those wildfires swept through their subdivision, perished in that unspeakable fire.

But even drowning in the ocean or being consumed mercilessly in a great conflagration will not necessarily be the end of those people, whom God has redeemed and made his own!

On the night before he died, Jesus said very frankly to his disciples: ***"In the world you have much tribulation but be of good cheer for I have overcome the world!" (John 16:33)***

I think the best commentary on this Old Testament lesson today is found in the 8th chapter of Romans, for us Christians: Here St. Paul writes, ***"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to all the glory to be revealed to us!"***

What then shall we say to these things, if God be for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his Son, but gave him up for us all, how shall he not together with Christ give us all good things?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors, for I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:18, 29-31)!

In **HOLY BAPTISM** God reaches out to us and makes one with himself, which means among other things that we should be committed to living "holy lives" before the Lord God and the other people with whom he surrounds us.

There were members of the Church in Rome, however, who were guilty of a sin that is spoken of in the Bible, sometimes, as **"licentiousness,"** or **"debauchery."** The view of such people is that **since we love to sin, and God is willing to forgive our sins for Jesus' sake,** then **why don't we just sin as much as we want to, live in any old disobedient way that we care to, knowing that God will forgive us?**

Do you hear St. Paul's rebuttal to all of that in our **Epistle Lesson** today? ***"What shall we say then, are we to continue to sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"***

We were baptized therefore with him by baptism into death, that just as he was raised from the dead, to the glory of the Father, we too, might walk in newness of life!

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his! (Romans 6:1-5)

There is so much, friends, I would like to share with you about BAPTISM, and all of the wonderful promises that our God makes to us about Baptism, all throughout the New Testament!

But I knew that my time today would be limited; so this is why I entitled the sermon today: "HOLY BAPTISM 101." I can remember when I was in college that any time you took an "Introductory Course" in any academic discipline, it was the name of the subject, followed by the number 101. Sociology 101, Psychology 101, Old Testament 101, or maybe even Biology 101.

Today as we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus, we would do well also to think about our own Baptisms and the abundant mercy that our God poured out upon our lives when we were baptized.

Why do we baptize? Because our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in the 28th chapter of St Matthew's Gospel tells us, *"Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and behold I am with you, unto the end of the age!"*

Let's remember that first Pentecost Sunday, when Jesus did baptize his disciples with the Holy Spirit and fire. How powerfully and beautifully they preached the Gospel, in their own native tongue, probably, of Aramaic, but Jewish people from all the other corners of the world, who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Old Testament Festival of Pentecost, heard these simple Galilean fishermen preaching to them in their own language!

Three thousand people were baptized on that day, and the New Testament doesn't tell us that they were all 12 years of age and older. Quite the contrary, this is what St. Peter had to tell them: *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. And this gift is for you and your children" (ACT 2:38-39).*

St Paul says in **GALATIANS 3:27**, *"As many of you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ!"*

I'd like to close by sharing with you a conversation that took place not too long ago between a devoted Christian mother and her teenaged son.

"Johnny, it's almost time for supper. Go into the bathroom and take a shower!"

"Mom, why in the world would I need to take a shower!"

"Because you were down at the park in 85 degree weather, playing basketball with your friends, and in the process you got all sweaty and dirty! Before long that sweat will dry on you and you will be rather smelly!"

"Oh, Mom. I am the closest to me and I don't smell anything!"

Some people are like Johnny and question or not they need to be baptized, even after they have come to faith by hearing the preaching of the Gospel. But the New Testament answers this question for us with a resounding “YES!”

Yes, we know that the thief on the cross did not have time to be baptized, but still Jesus promised him: “Today, you will be with me in paradise!”

Some people object to infant baptism saying, “That little boy doesn’t know what is happening!” And my first response to all of that is: “You are right! Baptism is God’s action and not our action!”

How many of you decided, before you were born into this physical world, with a physical body that you wanted to be born into this world? Not a one of you or me either! But still it happened.

And then there are those parents who say: ***“I am going to wait until my child is older and let them decide for themselves!” And oftentimes, this is because the parents are people with a very weak faith themselves!”***

If your daughter was two-years old and the cardiologist said she need a procedure done on her heart to save her life, would you say: “I’m going to wait until she’s old enough to make this decision for herself?”

Of course, you wouldn’t! I love that opening song we sang as the entrance hymn into this worship service today:

**“Baptized into your name most holy, O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost;
I claim a place though weak and lowly, among your saints your chosen hosts!
Buried with Christ and dead to sin, your Spirit now shall live within!**

**All that I am and love most dearly, receive it all, O Lord, from me!
Let me confess my faith sincerely, help me your faithful child to be!
Let nothing that I am or own, serve any will but yours alone!”**