

## Baptism of Our Lord, January 8, 2023

**Readings:** Joshua 3:1-3, 7-8, 13-17, 1 Corinthians 1:26–31, Matthew 3:13–17

### *In His Baptism, Jesus Takes His Place with Sinners*

Our Lord Jesus is baptized *“to fulfill all righteousness”* (Matt. 3:13–17). He partakes of a baptism for sinners in order that He might be our substitute and bear the judgment we deserve. In the water, Jesus trades places with us. Our sin becomes His sin. His righteousness becomes our righteousness. Our glory, therefore, is in *“Christ Jesus, who became to us . . . righteousness and sanctification and redemption”* (1 Cor. 1:26–31). Jesus is the *“chosen”* One sent from the Father to release us from the prison house of sin and death (Is. 42:1–7). Baptized into Christ, we also be-come the chosen ones, beloved of the Father. We cross the Jordan with Jesus (Joshua 3) through death into the promised land of new life with God.

### **Sermon Transcript:**

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We've moved rather quickly from the birth of Jesus and His circumcision to now He's about 30 years old, all in a week's time. The reason we do this, when you read the lessons for each Sunday, we don't necessarily follow chronological order. Sometimes you'll get early things and then you get late things. The point of it is we're moving towards a story and a goal, so each time we think about something.

Today, we are in the season of Epiphany. Epiphany was on January 6th, just a couple of days ago, and Epiphany is traditionally the time when we celebrate the appearance of the wise men. Now, if you went to my Bible class, you learned that the wise men weren't exactly wise. They were astrologers and diviners, and they thought they were wise in the ways of the world. But in reality, they were foolish. In fact, when everybody heard that the Magi showed up at Jesus' birth, they said, "Those idiots? How did they figure it out?" because they were foreigners. They didn't believe in God. They knew nothing of the Bible. They were looking to the stars like, "Oh, I'm a Capricorn. Now it's Tuesday." They were just foolish. They thought they were wise, but they didn't really know what was going on. God even showed them, like maybe the Gospel's for everybody. If it's for them, it might be for all of us. In fact, it is for all of us. But the Epiphany is that in spite of their lack of fully understanding what was going on, God revealed to them and to us who this person is, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior.

During this Epiphany season, the theme really is a revelation or an Epiphany, that light bulb going off like, "Ah! Now I understand a little bit better than I used to." This whole season is about revealing who Jesus is. Just a week ago, we talked about the circumcision, that Jesus Christ was circumcised on the eighth day, began His process of redemption by shedding His blood even at eight days for us. He did not need to follow the law completely because He was perfect. He did not need to be redeemed. He did not need to have sacrifices offered for Him. In fact, He did not need to be baptized for repentance because He was already perfect. He had nothing He needed to repent of. But everything that Jesus does is for the glory of God and for our benefit.

We learn a little bit more about Jesus as we learn why He was baptized. He was baptized so that He might fulfill all righteousness. John is baptizing in the River Jordan. And when the Pharisees and the Scribes come to him, he points at them, "Who are you, you brood of vipers to come flee the impending wrath." John wasn't exactly a subtle or gentle kind of a guy.

When Jesus shows up, he's like, "I can't baptize you. I need to be baptized by you." John understood that Jesus was the point. But Jesus says, "It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." John was the last of the Old Testament prophets. Yes, I know his name only comes in the New Testament, but the reality is he's of the Old Testament because he comes before Jesus. He is the last prophet of the Old Testament. He is the culmination

of all of the Old Testament prophecies, and he is joining with Jesus, the new covenant, to fulfill all righteousness. The old is passing away, the new has come. Jesus says, "It is time for us to fulfill the righteousness." We complete the demands of the law and the Old Testament, and we expand them and we provide redemption and righteousness in the New Testament, the new shedding of blood. No longer does the shedding of blood, the sacrifice, only cover the sins. Now, the sacrifice of the blood will wash away the sins, will cleanse all of us. See, He takes our place. He goes in our stead. He fulfills what we were unable to fulfill.

We see that even in our Old Testament lesson where we have Joshua leading the people into the promised land. Now, if you remember last week we learned that Joshua and Jesus have the same name in Hebrew. Joshua we translate from the Hebrew into English, Jesus we translate from the Greek, but they both mean the same thing in Hebrew: Yeshua, God saves.

The first Yeshua in the Old Testament comes after Moses, and he's leading his people forth into the promised land. How do they go into the promised land? They have to pass through the waters. What allows the waters to part so that they can pass safely through them? It's the Ark of the Covenant. What does the Ark of the Covenant represent? Well, the top of the Ark is called the mercy seat. It is the place where God promises to dwell with His people. Whenever they move throughout the wilderness, the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire was right over the Ark. To pass through the waters to get to the promised land, the Israelites had to be protected by the presence of God. His mercy allows them to pass through the waters from the wilderness to the promised land of Israel.

Jesus is doing the same thing for us. We are in the wilderness of this world. We are in the wilderness of our sins and our trespasses, and we are brought into the promised land of eternal life, salvation, and the forgiveness of sins through the waters of baptism, where the presence of God dwells in the water, to allow us to pass from sin to righteousness. God is present in the water. When we are baptized, we receive more than just a cleansing of physical form. We receive a cleansing of our spirit, of our souls. We are made righteous in Christ, because now the mercy seat dwells in Christ himself and Christ gives that mercy to us. And now Christ dwells in us through the waters and we pass from them into His promised land. We are to see Jesus taking the place of the people of Israel, taking the place of all people, providing us with salvation.

So the Epistle, in 1 Corinthians says, "I didn't call many of you who are wise or powerful or noble. In fact, I chose the foolish to shame the wise and the weak to shame the strong." Now, I don't quite like being called foolish or weak, but the reality is all of us are weak and foolish when it comes to the Word of God. Just like the Magi, hopefully none of us study the stars, but we don't understand God's Word all the time. The depth of the riches of the Word of God are new every day. I've been studying the Word of God practically my entire adult life. And yet every time I read, I find something new and greater and better. We always grow in our understanding of God because the Word of God is so rich. It is so deep that we can never plumb the depths of what it has to offer to us. The first thing we learn is that we have nothing to offer to God. We come foolish and weak and not very wise. And yet through His Son, He takes our place and He makes us wise through the power of the Holy Spirit. He gives us His wisdom. He gives us His righteousness. He gives us His sanctification and His redemption.

One of the things that we didn't talk about during this Christmas season and Epiphany is when Jesus was presented at the temple, a sacrifice was offered for Him to redeem Him back to His family. It was required of every firstborn child. It was called the redemption sacrifice. It's based all the way back to the time in Egypt and the Passover when the angel of death is prevented from killing the firstborn of all Israel. The firstborn were considered holy under the Lord.

Here is Jesus the firstborn, He's already holy because He's the Son of God, and yet His parents fulfilled the law by offering a redemptive sacrifice for Christ. Not because He needed to be redeemed, but because we needed to be redeemed, and therefore He fulfilled all of the righteousness that we were not able to fulfill. He takes our place and He gives us His righteousness, His holiness, His sanctification, and His salvation, and we give Him

our sins, our mistakes, our failures. Great gift. Wonderful bargain. I get all the blessings, He gets all the junk. I love it. But that's what He does. He takes our place. That's the Epiphany that we're talking about, the "a-ha moment", the light bulb going off, that we have nothing to offer to God, but He has given us all things through Christ. And that He does that through the waters, through baptism where we initially receive the benefit of His death on the cross. Every day we are called to remember our baptism. Every day we wash our faces, we are called to remember that we have been washed in the blood of Christ and we are renewed.

Every day we drown that old Adam, that sinful nature in the waters of baptism, and a new Adam, a perfect Christ is born in us through His redemption, through His sacrifice. We are new every day. As we start this new year, a lot of us maybe try and make New Year's resolutions and decide we're going to be better and do better and lose weight and eat better and all that other good stuff. It's great. It's marvelous to be renewed or to seek to be renewed in our personhood. But what we really need to remember is we are renewed in Christ every day.

Not just in the New Year, but every single day we are renewed and made new every day. We hear the word of God given to us freely. We can boast in the Lord. We can boast in His sacrifice. We can boast in His redemption. We can boast in His perfection. We can share that with all the rest of the foolish and weak people around us, which is all of us, you, me, and the rest of the world. God has come for all people, even those foolish Magi. He came for them. He comes for us. He is for all.

Let that message resonate and restore us each and every day that we might be ready in season and out to give witness to the hope that we have in Christ Jesus. Our redemption is complete through His waters, through His presence, through the blessing of Christ, His mercy given to us freely.

May His grace, mercy, and peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.