

“Singing the Faith – The Sacrament of Holy Baptism”

“O Lord open my lips and my mouth shall declare your praise.” This evening we sing of the mysteries of Holy Baptism with Luther’s baptismal hymn – “To Jordan Came the Christ, our Lord.”

The question that may immediately come to mind is – why does Jesus come to the Jordan in the first place – why does Jesus come to be baptized? St. Matthew’s Gospel tells us that John the Baptist tried to deter Jesus, saying to Him – “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

“To Jordan came the Christ, our Lord, to do His Father’s pleasure” – Luther writes. We know the Father’s will from 1 Timothy 2 (4-6). He wills or desires “all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”

Jesus Himself says it this way in His response to John – “Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

The Baptism of Jesus is not some symbolic act. Jesus and John are not just going through the motions – follow some kind of spiritual etiquette to please someone. This baptism is “to fulfill ALL righteousness.”

Jesus is the only mediator between God and man. He is our mediator. He has come to take our place – to fulfill God’s righteousness for us! Here, at His Baptism, we begin to see His work of ransoming us, redeeming us – setting us free from sin and death.

Here at the Jordan, He steps into the waters soiled by the sin of all those who have come to be baptized by John – and in His flesh, He takes on, He soaks up – the sin of the world.

He steps out of the Jordan and goes around preaching and teaching and healing – again, taking all mankind’s sin as His own. As St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians (5:21) – “For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

From His Baptism, Jesus goes forth to soak up the leprosy, the blindness, the demon possession, even death itself – and people are set free from sin, ransomed, redeemed – made to be righteous in God’s eyes.

“O hear and mark the message well, for God Himself has spoken ... God’s Holy Spirit here avows – our kinship while bestowing – the Baptism of His blessing.” To treasure Holy Baptism is to treasure our freedom, our ransom. To treasure Holy Baptism is to treasure our kinship with Christ – our Mediator, our Righteousness, our Redeemer.

[We sing stanzas 3 & 4 of LSB 406]

Holy Baptism is a sacrament – that is, a “mystery.” What we see with our eyes is water being applied to a person – and with our ears we hear, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.” But there is more than meets the eyes. We hear what God promises to do – but it knocks us for a loop.

Holy Baptism is treasured because of the great things God is doing in and through this water – but all of this is a mystery to our eyes – we see but simple water, a simple washing. That’s why the Small Catechism asks the question – “How can water do such great things?”

The great things are nothing less than – the forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation. “How CAN water do such great things?”!!! God, in His Word, reveals what He is doing in the Sacrament – His Word reveals the mystery.

Luther writes in the hymn, “These truths” – that is, Christ’s Baptism of blessing – “on Jordan’s banks were shown, by mighty word and wonder.” At the Jordan the working of the Triune God is revealed. We hear “the Father’s voice from heav’n came down ... This man is My beloved Son, in whom my heart has pleasure. Him you must hear, and Him alone, and trust in fullest measure – the word that He has spoken.”

This “carpenter’s son from Nazareth” is revealed to be none other than God’s own beloved Son. Jesus is God in the flesh – God come to dwell with us – so that in listening to Jesus’ Word, we are listening to God.

But that's not all – more is revealed. God the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove and remains on Him. Why? Because in Holy Baptism the Holy Spirit is given to you – to remain with you.

Or, as you sang – “The triune God assuring us, with promises compelling, that in our Baptism He will thus – among us find a dwelling – to comfort and sustain us.” The Holy Spirit assures you that God's promises in Baptism are yours. He comforts you with the peace of sins forgiven. He reminds you that you are a beloved child of God.

Holy Baptism is such a great treasure – for in Baptism, God Himself comes to you – to live and dwell with you.

[We sing stanzas 5-7]

The treasures of Holy Baptism that God has given to you – He desires for all people. “Every nation,” He says – that includes everyone – it excludes no one.

He sends His apostles out to preach and teach and baptize – or, as Luther puts it – “and bring to them the living Word.” Jesus is the living Word of God – the Word made flesh. Baptism brings this living-Word-Jesus to the baptized – and Jesus does what we seen Him doing in the Gospels – He preaches repentance and the forgiveness of sins – He soaks up sin and death, ransoming sinners from death to life.

“But woe to those who cast aside this grace so freely given ...” To cast aside Holy Baptism is to cast aside Christ and the grace He gives – it is to cast aside the Father, and the Holy Spirit – it is to cast aside the life He gives.

Holy Baptism seems so simple, powerless, even trite, to the eye – but to your ears the treasures of this mystery are revealed. “Before the eye of faith unfolds the power of Jesus' merit. For here it sees the crimson flood to all our ills bring healing.”

Jesus is baptized in order to fulfill ALL righteousness – and that righteousness demands a sacrifice for sin – it demands a life. Jesus is baptized because He has come to be crucified – to be sacrificed on the cross.

In death His side is split open by the spear and immediately “water and blood” come forth. In the water of Holy Baptism – the blood which pours forth from Jesus’ side – the blood of the atoning sacrifice – is poured out on you – and by His wounds, in Holy Baptism, you are healed.

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