

"Baptized INTO Christ"
Romans 6:1-11

January 13, 2013

The Baptism of our Lord

The season of Epiphany is a time of mysteries being revealed by mysteries. Last week, we read about the incarnation – the eternal God who fills the heavens and the earth taking on human form – being revealed to Gentiles by a miraculous star. Next week, we will read about the divine power of Jesus of Nazareth being revealed by Him changing water into wine at a wedding feast. Today, we read about the identity of Jesus as the Son of God at His baptism when the Father's voice from heaven declared it to be so.

But what about the baptism itself? What does that all mean? Normally, we think of baptism being done to benefit the one being baptized. This was John the Baptist's understanding when Jesus came to be baptized. In the account in St. Matthew, it reads, "John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'" Jesus' baptism is something special. He does not get baptized to get something. Jesus gets baptized to give something – to us.

We fail to understand the meaning of Jesus' baptism as spelled out for us in the Gospel reading and we fail to appreciate the significance of our baptisms as spelled out for us in the Epistle reading because we fail to understand or remember the nature of sin. We tend to think of sin as a series of offenses. Sins are the actions in which we do the bad and wrong things which God has forbidden. If we have a better understanding of sin, we will may also see sin as a series of actions in which we fail to do the good and right things which God has commanded.

If that is all that sin is – isolated incidents – then we may underestimate the solution to sin. Some people think that by better learning the will of God through Bible Study and worship and trying really hard, the problem of sin can be overcome an act of the will. We can get rid of sin by leading more moral lives.

Most will see that this is an inadequate solution. It's not just that we haven't tried hard enough. Something is broken in us. Therefore, we will think that that the solution for sin is for God to "fix us". He needs to take away our sin and help us live better lives. Now that sounds pretty good but is still inadequate.

Sin does more than taint us or break us. We cannot simply be "fixed" from sin or become improved or better. Sin has done too much damage. Sin separates us from God. Sin cuts us off completely from all that is good and holy. Death is the result of sin because death is the separation of the sinner from God. When Jesus bore the full load of the sin of the world on the cross and experienced God's judgment against that sin, He did not say, "I have been tainted!" or "I have become morally inadequate." No, He said, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" Sin and death separates from God.

Jesus, the Son of God, comes to John the Baptist to be baptized. He was not doing this to correct something from His past. Jesus was baptized in order to make right something in the future – our future. In His baptism, Jesus connects Himself to the water of baptism so that the water of baptism could connect us to Him.

Several times in our text, it speaks of the fact that we have not simply been baptized, nor even baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. But it says we have been baptized INTO Christ and INTO His death. (The word "into" was so important that it is capitalized in the title of the sermon in the bulletin.)

Have you ever stopped to think of the implications of that one little word? I first had to long ago when I was a pastor of a deaf church in Wisconsin. The sign for *into* is very spatially oriented (show sign). You can go into a room, get into a car, or put your hands into gloves. But to use that sign with that meaning would be clear.

After some study of the Greek, I came to the conclusion that the meaning of this word "into" had more of a meaning of "being joined to or connected" (show sign). In baptism, we are no longer

separated from God. We are joined to Christ. This means that we share everything with Him. In our baptism, all that we have and are is given to Christ. All that Christ has and is becomes ours.

We have been baptized into the death of Jesus Christ. We are connected to His death. Our sin, our guilt, and God's judgment against sin is given to Jesus. His holiness, His innocence, and God's acquittal becomes ours through the forgiveness of sin.

Because we are joined to the death of Jesus Christ, we are also joined to His burial. That means our sinful life which we have inherited from Adam and practiced on our own has been buried in the tomb of Christ. We are free from the effects of sin because of that. We are no longer enslaved to sin. We have been set free for, as the text says, "one who has died has been set free from sin." We no longer bear its guilt and shame. They are in the tomb. We are no longer obligated to sin. That sinful self has drowned and died in the waters of Holy Baptism.

Because Jesus Christ experienced resurrection from the dead, we, too, are also joined to that in our baptism. We have life – new life – life that is different than life that is before baptism. Of course, that refers to eternal life in the peace and perfection of heaven. But it is much much more than that. It is also new life right now. Some Christians live as if they are to wallow around in the filth of sin, either because they secretly want to or because they can't help it, while they wait for the future gift of a better life only in heaven.

Our baptisms give us that life now. Our text says, "Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Our lives as Christians are not to try and improve ourselves so that we might have a better life in God's eyes. Our lives as Christians are to live in the better baptismal lives which are already ours through our connection to Christ because, in God's eyes, we are His holy sons and daughters.

What does this mean? It means you are free. First of all, you are free from excuses – whether you want to be or not. Paul wrote this section of Scripture to cut off any possible excuse-making on the part of Christians. He spent the first five chapters of Romans telling people that all

people have sinned and are justified by God (i.e. become right with Him) solely by God's grace through faith. That leads some people to excuse their behavior by saying, "We couldn't help ourselves in sinning. Besides God loves us and forgives us for Jesus' sake." Paul says, "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it!" We have died to sin, been buried with Christ, and rose to new life with Christ in our baptism. It is absurd to think that we would ever want to continue in sin.

We are free from guilt and fear. We will still sin, even when we don't want to and are trying not to. By being connected to Christ in our baptism, we have His holiness and sonship. Therefore, we are not burdened by guilt. Our sin has been taken away. We do not live under fear, wondering if we are good enough or whether we will go to heaven or not. That is assured as well. As our text says, "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."

We are simply free to live in our baptism. We are not fixed and improved sinners. We are completely new creatures. It is as St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor 5:17) We are free from the demands of the law and whether we have sinned too much. We are free from any competition in sanctified living and whether we have not done enough good. We are completely free live in love for God by loving and serving our neighbor.

Another mystery of Epiphany is revealed through a mystery. The nature of our lives in Christ is revealed through the baptism of Christ. In His baptism, He is connected to us. In our baptisms, we are connected to Him. And we live life, both now and in all eternity, in Christ and Christ in us. Amen.