

Sermon - 01-08-23
Ps 29; Is 42:1-9; Ac 10:34-43; Mt 3:13-17
Baptism of the Lord Sunday

“Denis’ baby brother had been baptized at church. Denis sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car. His dad asked him three times what was wrong. Finally, Denis replied, ‘That preacher said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, but I want to stay with you guys.’” (cleanchristianjokes.html)

Jesus was brought into the family of God when he was only eight days old. Mary and Joseph took Him to the temple where he was circumcised. Among the Jews, that religious act was a sign that He belonged to the nation of Israel and to God. So, when He later went down to the Jordan River where John was baptizing the crowds, He was bringing in a new way – the way of entering the fellowship of God – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. He was about thirty years old at that time.

John thought Jesus should baptize him, not the other way around. “But Jesus insisted. ‘Do it. God’s work, putting things right all these centuries, is coming together right now in this baptism.’ So, John did it.” (Mt 3:15)

Jesus did not just tell His followers what to do – He lived it out before them by His own obedience to God. This new act of surrender to God’s will was accompanied by a sign. A dove descended and rested on Jesus. Then, a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son whom I dearly love; I find happiness in Him.” (Mt 3:17 CEB) So, the church (that’s you and me) continues to obey the practice of baptism. The blessing of the water, the act of immersion, pouring or sprinkling is performed by an anointed minister. The baptized rises from the waters of chaos into the household of God. We say it is “an outward sign of inward grace.” Something has already taken place in order for the congregation and the leader to perform this Service of Holy Baptism.

In the Old Testament we learn the great story of God gathering a people for Himself – the saga of men and women who heard God’s Word and believed. In the Bible we find the Servant Songs – or the Songs of the Suffering Servant. Isaiah spoke about Jesus before He took on human flesh. His character and His deeds are previewed by the prophets all along in the history of God’s people. Prophets taught the people what to watch for – to be ready for Messiah.

Perhaps you have studied these songs. There are four songs, some say five. We heard the first one read aloud this morning: Is 42:1-9.

The others are found in Is 49, 50, 52-53, and perhaps 61:1-3. Chapter sixty-one does not mention “servant.”

The character of Jesus Christ is outlined in the Servant Song. Listen:

“Take a good look at my servant.

I’m backing him to the hilt.

He’s the one I chose,

and I couldn’t be more pleased with him.

I’ve bathed him with my Spirit, my life.

He’ll set everything right among the nations.

He won’t call attention to what he does

with loud speeches or gaudy parades.

He won’t brush aside the bruised and the hurt

and he won’t disregard the small and insignificant,

but he’ll steadily and firmly set things right.

He won’t tire out and quit. He won’t be stopped

until he’s finished his work—to set things right on earth. (Is 42:1-4 MSG)

(Continued on next page.)

We look for these qualities in a leader. We pray to grow in these ways ourselves, don't we? At our best, we work for peace with justice in the world we live in here and now. No quitting, no excuses. Like Jesus.

All four Gospels tell of Jesus' baptism. (Mk 1:9-11, Lk 3:21-22, Jn 1:31-34) Jesus insisted on being baptized by his cousin, John. ***It was an outward sign of His inward grace.*** At His baptism, He set out the path for all who want be part of Him. Jesus ***is*** the Covenant. His body, His blood, His Spirit – these are our way of New Life. We follow Him – we praise and worship Him – we become part of Jesus. Even saying His name aloud is an act of our will being conformed to His will – the very will of God.

This morning Peter is presenting the Gospel of Jesus to a household of Gentile God-fearers. The centurion Cornelius is a local commander in the Roman army at Caesarea. Probably, his home was the headquarters of the garrison. The whole force of Roman military stationed there would have been about 3,000 soldiers.

This moment of Peter's visit to Cornelius' house is the first Gentile Baptism into Jesus Christ recorded since John was baptizing in the Jordan. While Peter spoke this brief message, the Holy Spirit descended upon the place and all those who had heard the Word began to praise God and to speak in other tongues. This is an important moment for us today. The Holy Spirit is faithful in all places, and at all times. It is the message. Faith in Jesus at the hearing of the Gospel brings this inward grace – work accomplished by the Savior Himself among those gathered in His name. The Covenant is Jesus.

Holy Baptism, along with Holy Communion, are the sacraments of the church. These are times when we recognize and celebrate Immanuel – God with us. The greatest promise of God is fulfilled in Jesus. He is our Covenant. Listen to the Servant Song:

“I am the Lord, I have called You (Jesus) in righteousness,
I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You,
And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people,
As a light to the nations,
To open blind eyes,
To bring out prisoners from the dungeon
And those who dwell in darkness from the prison.” (Is 42:6, 7)

That prison is sin.

Jesus is our freedom, our washing, our assurance, our Covenant. Baptism is a sign of His presence in us. Amen.