

Baptism of Our Lord

8:30 and 10:45 a.m. Sunday, January 8, 2012

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Mark 1: 4-11

May the Words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen

This past Thursday was my youngest son Casey's sixth birthday. For Casey it was the first birthday that he really seemed aware of as it approached. He was counting down the days this past week as he was eagerly awaiting turning six. It was very

cute to see the excitement of a newly minted six year old.

This had me thinking back to when I was six. Despite what the kids and my wife might think, it was not that long ago. Well, at least my parents might agree with me. I was thinking back to the toys that I would play with when I was about six years old. Two toys came to mind. One was my Lionel trains, (This might make me sound older than I really am) and the other was my Evil Knieval Stunt Cycle.

Lionel trains are a Roy family tradition. My grandfather was very big into his Lionel trains and my collection of trains grows from Grandpa Roy and my dad's love of model railroading. The Lionel trains took time to set up. The circle of track took time to

piece together, laying out the path on which the train will travel. (Please let's not call them toys since I still play, I mean enjoy, my electric trains.) Then of course there is the placement of the locomotive and cars on the track as well, making sure all the cars are coupled together and ready to go, before we turn on the transformer, and slowly give power to the train and it begin the journey on which we are about to embark.

The Evil Knievel Stunt cycle..... Well that was another story. Who here remembers this toy? It was really cool. For those of you who are "prehistorically challenged", Robert "Evil" Knievel was this motorcycle riding daredevil, who to a young boy in the mid-70s was the coolest man on the planet! He would jump buses and cars on his Harley Davidson motorcycle on ABC's Wide World of Sports.

He once attempted a jump of Snake River Canyon on a Rocket cycle. At the height of his popularity there were these toys based upon his stunts cycles. You would put this action figure (guys don't play with dolls) on a stunt cycle, rev up the friction gyro motor, either with a crank mechanism or by repeated running of the tires on the ground, and off the toy would go ! ! !

Now you might be wondering? Vicar? What do your favorite toys have to do with the baptism of Jesus? Well, the connection is not with Jesus, but how we hear the message. (The sigh of relief I just heard is from the Bishop and Pastor Easton relaxing now that they know I am not making Jesus a Harley riding daredevil.)

The last few weeks we have heard the Christmas story about birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. We have been reminded of the wonderful traditional stories of angels and the births of John the Baptist and of Jesus. We have had passages from Luke speaking of shepherds in the field, and the baby, in a manger because there was no room in the inn. Like a Lionel train set we are laying the track that the journey of Jesus will begin. We have had passages from Matthew spelling out Jesus's family ties back to David and Abraham. (The connections from the beginning of a train to the caboose that is Jesus,) Matthew also tells of Joseph's support of Mary and the coming of the magi to worship the new born King. It is in Matthew that the journey on the tracks is laid out in scripture that lead Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus on a great escape from Herod. The lessons for Advent, Christmas and

Epiphany have been like a train, slowly building up steam. Momentum can begin slowly, like with trains, as the tradition is explained to the readers.

Now our gospel reading today is from the Gospel of Mark. We are in the lectionary year of Mark, and Mark is different than the other Gospels. Mark has everything happening right now! Like an Evil Knievel Stunt cycle it takes very little revving up (just three verses) and we are off..... Hitting the ground running! The Gospel of Mark has not birth story; no little babies, no admiring sheep and shepherds, no visitors from lands far away bringing gifts. No, in Mark's version there is no remembering the tradition or laying of the tracks. Our passage begins at the 4th verse and it is time to get to work!

Our passage starts off with John the Baptist. The description of his diet and clothing tells us he is a rather non-conformist religious figure. His ministry of baptism is found in the River Jordan. The River is at the edge of the wilderness, far from the temple in the center of town. John's ministry is of a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This ministry is a break from the religious systems and structures that traditionally supports the status quo of politics and religion working hand in hand. John's message is not the traditional teaching from the Temple. John preaches of the coming of; "The one, who is more powerful than I, is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and unite the thing of his sandals." (Mark 1:7)

We are immediately told of John's baptism of Jesus. We read about how, as Jesus comes up out of the

water, the heavens are ripped apart and the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus like a dove. A voice from heaven proclaims God's love for his Son. If we read ahead a few more verses we would read about the Holy Spirit pushing Jesus into the wilderness for a time of testing and temptations. In two weeks we will be just two verses later and Mark will have Jesus back from the wilderness and is calling his disciples.

There is no waiting around in the Gospel of Mark. Like an Evil Knievel stunt cycle, everything is unfolding with immediate urgency and the power of dynamite. Mark is ready to tell the story and it begins in the waters of baptism.

For Mark the baptism of Jesus is the *start* of something new. It is a new beginning. The water of the Jordan marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

Jesus' baptism is when God, through the Holy Spirit, descends upon the Son and he is let loose in this world that he has created. This is the transition point: from what was, to what will be. Baptism is a new beginning.

Today is our opportunity to remember and celebrate the baptism of Jesus. In remembering our Savior's baptism we should reflect upon our own baptisms as well. As Lutherans we are taught to remember our baptism, encouraged to celebrate their anniversaries. In remembering our baptism it should be more than looking at pictures that family or friends may have taken in church one Sunday during worship. We are reminded of what Paul wrote in Second Corinthians: "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed

away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor. 5:17)

Our baptism is into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our baptism is when we are united into the community of the church. If we were too young to remember the events of our own baptisms, we have a community of believers who will remind us of their collective response to support and pray for us in our new life with Christ. Our Baptisms are a uniting of our lives and our personal ministries in this world with the ministry of Jesus. As a follower of Christ are called to be the hands, the feet, the heart, the soul, and the love active in the world for Christ. As a church we are called to do; "God's work with Our Hands."

Too often we forget that our baptism is our calling. We try to tuck it away as an event in our past, an event we can pay homage to without being bothered with too much in our daily lives. We often refer to it as a milestone we have past, not a benchmark we are called to still achieve. We are tempted to rely on others to do God's work while we go about focusing on our own selfish business, only to call on God when we feel the need of some form of divine assistance. When we are remembering our baptism we are remembering our calling into a community of active believers in God's creation.

In this year of Mark, let us embrace the urgency expressed in the message he shares in his Gospel. Jesus emerged from the waters of the Jordan and immediately began his ministry; we are called to do the same. Baptism is not a single moment. Baptism

is like the waters in which we are baptized in, ever flowing and continuous. Like Jesus, in our baptisms, we should see the world and respond to the needs before us. Jesus heard from God "This is my Son, whom I am well pleased", and we, at our baptisms, also received these words from God: "This is my son, or, this is my daughter, whom I love, and with whom I am well pleased." In our baptisms **we** are the ones that the Holy Spirit drives back into the world to be; the hands, and feet, and the love of Christ, in our modern world.

As we go into our world today, let us be reminded that the love of Christ shines through all of us, and know that we are never alone. The Holy Spirit is active in all of us and in the neighbor you serve, comfort, and love in Christ's name today and every day.

AMEN.

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