



“God Made Known in the Water”

Baptism of Our Lord
Saturday & Sunday, January 12–13, 2019
All Services
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

To better understand our gospel lesson today, we need to hike back a few verses to the beginning of Luke 3. John, who we learn in Luke 1 is Jesus' cousin, comes on the scene, shouting the proclamation:

Prepare the way of the Lord! Make the roads smooth and straight!

Then John jumps right into things:

*You scum! Do you think you can keep doing the wickedness you revel in, and God is **not** going to notice? I don't care if you say: "Well, we have Abraham as our ancestor." Do you think God isn't capable of creating descendants of Abraham out of these very stones? It's How. You. Live. Your. Life. that's important to Gd.*

So, then the people whine in response:

What are we supposed to do?

John lays it out for them:

You who have plenty of clothes, give to those who have none. Those of you who deal with finances, treat all people fairly. Those of you in positions of authority, don't bend the people to your own personal gain.

Instead of telling people what they want to hear - *Don't worry, you're just fine. You've got the covenant of Abraham. Take care of yourself first and keep making those required sacrifices* - rather than telling the people that, instead, John tells them *how to live*. John tells them how to be *humane* to one another. John reminds them they are to be *compassionate* to those who are need, that they need to care for those who are **not** in as positive of a position as they themselves are; care for those who don't have enough food, or a safe place to live.

And, *surprisingly*, the people were interested in what John had to say, to the point that they were talking amongst themselves, asking

Is this guy the messiah we've been waiting for?

John clarifies for them (which is where our gospel reading picks up for today):

*No. I am **not** the messiah. **That** one is coming **after** me, and I am not worthy to*

untie his sandal laces. I am baptizing you with water. The one after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

Immediately we learn there is a difference between the two baptisms: John is baptizing for **repentance**; Jesus' baptism, involving the Spirit, is for **forgiveness**.

With *John's* baptism, you rise up out of the water; your proverbial slate wiped clean. Then you walk out onto the river bank, and start sinning all over again, wracking up those marks on your slate. With *Jesus'* baptism of the Spirit, we rise out of the waters, forgiven, our slate wiped clean, but *now*, our slate is coated in Teflon, to never again receive another mark on it. It's not the water that does this: It's how God is made known to us in the water.

I am going slightly off track and ask you all to bear with me. I am going to guess that everyone here, in this building right now, has a very special room in your home, a room that is pretty much dedicated to the use of . . . water. In our house, in that room, we have a porcelain basin that is designed specifically to allow me to easily Wash my hands and face, brush my teeth, and shave. We have another area of this room where I can stand and let water flow over me, from top to bottom. And, we have this amazing bowl like piece of equipment that is filled with fresh, clean, drinkable water. Into this bowl, I eliminate my bodily waste. then, even more incredibly, I then flip a lever, and the water flushes those things out of that room, out of my house altogether, down the street, and away to parts unknown to me.

All of us here have an entire *room* (some of us, more than one!) dedicated to all those different uses for **water**. Do you know how many people in this world *don't* have a room like that? Do you know how many people have to walk a mile simply to get drinking water? Yeah, neither do I, and I didn't want to look up the answer because I knew it would be too depressing, but whatever the number of people who do not have easy access to clean water, **It's Too Many**.

Water is *essential* to human life. Water is essential to pretty much all life as we know it. We use water clean ourselves. We use water to clean our clothes. We use water to clean our homes. We use water to clean our cars and streets. We use water to cook; to boil, steam, wash, and or somehow assist us in practically everything we eat. Our bodies are filled with water. Water Brings Life. Admittedly, water can also be deadly. There are water borne diseases. Pollution in water is not a good thing. But in general, water brings life.

Our faith uses that imagery of water to help us grow in belief. The separation of water & dry land was the second step in the story of creation. We learned that God cleansed the planet in the story of Noah & the flood. The people of Israel escaped from the armies of the pharaoh by crossing the Red Sea, and the waters kept them safe. God provided water from a rock when the people were thirsty in the desert. Water is necessary for life, and is water is important to us in our faith.

We, as Christians in the Lutheran tradition, say that water used in baptism is an *ordinary element*, used in *extraordinary* circumstances. Martin Luther said that God is "in, with,

and under” the water. We could say that the Spirit “infuses” the water with the Spirit; that it is the faith of those believers gathered together that cause the water to be “more than” just water; that the Spirit is present in the water. That water is “holy” during the rite of baptism, but then “reverts” to being “ordinary” when the rite is completed. Whatever it is that happens at baptism, God uses the water to help us Slow, Stupid Humans attempt to comprehend the impossibility that happens at our baptism. When Jesus was baptized, He rose from the waters, and the Spirit descended on him looking like a dove. When we arise from our baptism, the Spirit is washed over us in the waters of the font, and God becomes present in our lives: while we worship; when we depart from here and head home, or to work, or to school, or wherever we go, God remains with us.

What makes us different, what sets us apart from this world - this world that tells us we need to 'look out for number one,' to 'do things my way or it's the highway,' to put 'Me first' - What sets us as believers apart from this world, is how we live out those promises that were made at our baptism, how we allow those promises to affect our everyday lives. We probably don't remember them, so let me remind us of those promises that we will:

nurture our faith so that we might learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace. (ELW, p 228)

When we all allow the waters of our baptism into our lives; when we stop turning our backs on God and stop telling God “No”; when we Stop doing all that, we are telling the world we will **Not** take advantage of those less fortunate than us; we will **Not** ignore those who may have fallen on bad times, regardless of whether it was through their own mismanagement, or events beyond their control. When we strive to live a baptismal life, if we are in positions of authority, we do **Not** use that position for our own personal gain but use that position to give aid to those in need.

Are we willing, through the life-giving waters of our baptism, to live differently from the world? Are we willing to share God made known to us in water in order to tell others of Christ's life-giving message of grace, and love, and forgiveness?

Sisters and brothers, I hope your answer is “Yes.”

Amen.

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