

1.9.2022, Baptism of Our Lord

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Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

“With you I am well pleased”

*Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

Today’s gospel contains God’s proclamation about Jesus: “*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*” These words proclaim the love of the Father for the Son.

I hope each of you have been told and have also told someone, “I love you.” When God the Father revealed Jesus as the beloved Son, saying, “*with you I am well pleased,*” God was saying, “I love you.” This is what God says to each of us in Holy Baptism, “I love you, my beloved child, with you I am well pleased.”

Yet I also know that each of us, your pastor included, has felt deflated or even defeated by life. Perhaps it was a mistake, a poor choice, a moral failure, and yet in the covenant of Holy Baptism, God continues to say to each of us, “I still love you, no matter what” – “*with you I am well pleased.*” That is the amazing thing about God: God’s love never lets go of us. Even in our sinfulness, God waits for us to return, always loving us, because God is steadfast and merciful. We need to hear God’s words spoken to Jesus as words also spoken to us. Each week as we kneel in confession, we hear again, the liberating grace that frees us to live as God’s beloved children.

It’s no mistake that the Baptism of Our Lord comes very quickly after Christmas and Epiphany as the church calendar reveals to us who Jesus is and why he was born. We begin to see very clearly that the celebration of Jesus’ birth is also about our own birth as beloved children of God. In Holy Baptism, a fallen humanity is raised to new life and restored with the image of God that had been lost to sin.

Jesus, of course, did not need to be baptized; he did not need to even become human, but the Son of God, the Logos, became human in Jesus out of love and compassion for humanity – for you and for me. In Jesus’ baptism we see God sharing our humanity. Luke’s gospel tells us that Jesus was baptized along with the many other people who had come to John to be baptized in the Jordan. Jesus did not need a baptism of repentance, *yet he chose* to mingle among and to become friends with everyday people – people like you and me. Later in Luke, chapter 5, Jesus says, “*I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*” Jesus’ mission is about you and me.

Though John said, “*the one who more powerful than I is coming..he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire,*” notice that Jesus did not seek a “special Son of God” private baptism; Jesus

was baptized among the people he came to save.

Luke also tells us that Jesus was praying after his baptism. These words are significant because Jesus models for us prayerful contemplation upon baptism. The scene is remarkable: the Son of God, knelt in prayer after his baptism. By seeking a baptism of repentance and praying afterwards, Jesus was modeling what we do every Sunday as we kneel in prayerful repentance, leaning upon God's grace and mercy in our own baptisms.

Let's take a moment to think about Jesus and prayer. In this scene, Luke doesn't tell us that Jesus knelt in prayer, but if we look at other places in Luke we learn more about Jesus' prayer life. In Luke, chapter 5, we are told that Jesus often went to a quiet place to pray, and in Luke, chapter 22, we are told that in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus knelt in prayer asking God to take the cup of suffering from him. This is the only place that specifically mentions that Jesus knelt in prayer. There is something here to think about. This may have been the way Jesus always prayed. In kneeling Jesus was humbling himself before the Father. Early Christians made this the posture of prayer and repentance, giving it a very special word "*exomologesis*" (ἐξομολόγησις), because this posture reveals humility and modesty in seeking God's help and forgiveness.

Jesus' prayer should make us ask, "Do I pray like Jesus? Do I often make quiet time for prayer? Do I kneel as a sign of humility before God? Do I associate with those who also need forgiveness?" Look around you, all of us here today have come seeking to hear God's word of grace and forgiveness. All of us are here because, in some way, we have heard the call of Jesus to return to the Lord again this week and hear the life giving words of forgiveness and love: "*With you I am well pleased.*"

However, let's go a bit deeper. By coming to John for baptism, Jesus was bearing witness against himself. Though he was without sin, he was clothed in our humanity. He joined the crowds at the Jordan, slipping into their lives, into their humanity, and kneeling among them in prayer. The crowds had come to admit to God their need of forgiveness from their sins. These people bore witness against their sins, trusting in God's forgiveness. Jesus, the one about whom John said was more powerful than himself – the King of kings – came among them, and bore witness against himself, by emptying himself of all power. In doing so, Jesus witnessed to his humanity and identity with us. Jesus the King knelt among our gathered humanity in prayer. At Jesus' baptism we see a King who walks among and kneels with his people in humble human equality.

Just two weeks ago we celebrated Jesus' humble birth in a stable to two young parents who were

neither wealthy nor powerful. Jesus' humble birth and modest background points to our own humanity. Paul says it best in Philippians "*Let the same mind be among you that was in Christ Jesus that though he was in the form of God...emptied himself, taking the form of a slave...And being found in human form, humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.*"

Just two weeks after the lights and decorations, the tree and the gifts, we see the gift of Jesus very clearly dwelling in our humanity, kneeling in prayer. We see a King who is willing to kneel alongside his people, so that he might lift them up. Jesus was born to kneel with us so that he might raise us up in forgiveness and newness of life. The road to the cross and the suffering love of Jesus begins in his baptism as Jesus kneels in prayer, and the Father says, "*with you I am well pleased.*"

So I ask again, has someone told you they love you? Has someone told you they love you even after you have sinned against them? Jesus showed his love for the crowds of people seeking forgiveness at the Jordan, and Jesus does this for each of us. He kneels alongside you in your humanity, listening to your confession, so that he might raise you to newness of life through the waters of Holy Baptism.

Psalm 29 today reminds us, "*The voice of the Lord is over the waters.*" Psalm 29 evokes the second verse of the entire Bible, Genesis 1:2, "*and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.*" God has been creating life out of water since the beginning. Anyone familiar with Martin Luther's writings knows that Luther wrote that baptism is "water and God's word." Baptism is water and God's word of forgiveness and new life. When we are baptized we die to sin and are raised by Christ to newness of life.

The sending hymn for today, "Baptized and Set Free" (ELW 453), contains the words, "Jesus opened the door to a fountain bringing healing, and wholeness and more." Jesus was born to kneel with us in prayer, to hear and know our pain; Jesus was born to share our humanity. He has opened the door to a fountain of grace. We are only baptized once in our lives, but God's Spirit moves over the waters of baptism our entire lifetimes, always saying, "*with you I am well pleased.*"

The sending hymn ends with words, "precious river, ever-flowing, now carry us home." The waters of baptism will carry and forgive you all your life; the waters of baptism will carry you home to eternal life. As Jesus has forgiven you, over your lifetime kneel in humility alongside others, seeking forgiveness and forgiving others.

And remember God's words, "*with you I am well pleased.*" Amen.