

## Baptism of Our Lord A (1/9/11 – *Revealed as Beloved of the Father in Holy Baptism*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

With the *Divine Service* this past Thursday, the Church has entered the season of *Epiphany*. And in today's Holy Scriptures, we behold the divinity of the Son of God manifest in the flesh. In particular, we see Jesus *Revealed as Beloved of the Father in Holy Baptism*. As the Father's heavenly words declare at His Baptism in the Jordan, Jesus is the *Beloved Son, with Whom* the Father is *well pleased* [MT 3.17]. This is important! By these heavenly words – and with the Holy Spirit's descent – Jesus the Man is marked as ... revealed as ... epiphanied as ... the Son of God the Father. This Man (and none other) is at the same time – in the one united Person – the only-begotten Son ... *very God of very God*.

Now, that is good and wondrous news by itself. But when the Holy Spirit descends and remains on Jesus at His Baptism, He also is made known as the Christ, the promised Messiah. And this *epiphany* is not only for John – to whom God had revealed that it would be so ... as we shall hear next Sunday – but also for us who have heard the message given through Isaiah: *Behold My Servant, Whom I uphold, My Chosen One, in Whom My soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon Him* [ISA 42.1]. This Jesus, Who *increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man* [LK 2.52], is none other than the Chosen Servant of God.

And there is more to this blessed epiphany! At His Baptism in the Jordan at the hands of John – as He begins His public ministry on our behalf and for our eternal salvation – Jesus fully identifies with our human condition. The Chosen Servant unites to Himself our fallen-ness ... our sinfulness ... our dying-ness ... our need for cleansing and restoration to life. Now, Jesus has already begun to identify with us. That began with His Incarnation – His conception and birth ... as we have just celebrated during *Christmastide*. He has also already begun to carry our burden of being under God's holy Law – He went under the knife at eight days ... has offered the sacrifices ... kept the Passover in Jerusalem. But the Baptism of Our Lord is one more step in our Lord's work of fulfilling His Name – *and you shall call His Name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins* [MT 1.21].

When the very human Jesus comes with the hordes of sinners to the waters of the Jordan, and John says: ***I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?*** [MT 3.14] ... intending to prevent Jesus, our Lord replies: ***Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*** [3.15]. It is true enough that even such a dedicated and Godly man as the desert Prophet, St. John the Baptizer, is in need of the washing of regeneration. How much more we whose faith wanes as we are distracted by the “soft clothing” and other fleeting “luxuries” of our much easier life? Thus, if our sinful flesh is not overly proud and blind – like it often is – we agree with John and bow before the Lord in humble repentance, declaring: ***I need to be baptized by You! I need Your washing into the forgiveness of my sins!*** We need to be cleansed from all the filth and shame of our sins ... and our sinfulness. We need the old Adam in us to *be drowned and die with all its sins and evil lusts* [SC IV.4].

On the other hand, He Who is sinless has little – indeed, **NO!** – need of such purification ... since He is **pure** ... and **purity** itself. But understand just what the Chosen Servant is doing here. This One – of Whom the Father says in Isaiah, ***My Chosen One, in Whom My soul delights*** ... and declares before all the world in our *Holy Gospel*, ***This is My Beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased.*** This One is the true and eternal Son.

In the Old Testament – at the Exodus – God begins referring to Israel as His son. He commands Moses to go back to Egypt and give Pharaoh this message: ***Thus says the LORD, “Israel is My firstborn son, and I say to you, ‘Let My son go that he may serve Me.’ If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.”*** [EXO 4.22-23] Through the Prophet Jeremiah, God says: ***Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he My darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him declares the LORD.*** [JER 31.20] The nation Israel is as a *beloved son* to the Lord. Jesus is the true and faithful ***Beloved Son.***

In all things, this One stands in **our** stead. But He does so in perfect, *substitutionary* righteousness – **for us** and for our salvation! And since we are in need of the cleansing that only God can give – every one of us ... down to the last man, woman, and child – the Lord Jesus Christ undergoes

Holy Baptism *to fulfill all righteousness*, as He tells John. It is, in fact, divinely **necessary** – since Jesus comes as the Chosen Servant of the Father to redeem the whole world from sin. It is *fitting* – that is, it is good, proper, *meet, right, and salutary* – in fulfillment of the promise we heard in ISAIAH: ***Behold My Servant, Whom I uphold, My Chosen One, in Whom My soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. ... He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till He has established justice in the earth.*** [ISA 42.1, 3c-4]

*The Baptism of Our Lord* is just the beginning of His public ministry on our behalf. He must still be rejected. He must yet be wrongfully accused and tried and scourged. He must ultimately undergo the “baptism” of the Cross – be crucified, dead, and buried. But ... ***He will not grow faint or be discouraged till He has established justice*** – God’s righteousness and salvation – ***in the earth***. He will not look back or falter until He has worked our salvation and been raised from the tomb. He will set His face like flint for the task [ISA 50.7] – and by His death and resurrection He will fill the waters of Holy Baptism with His forgiveness and life!

That is what gives **our** Baptism its blessings – Christ’s Baptism and Crucifixion and Resurrection. As St. Paul says: ***Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by Baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*** [ROM 6.3-4] By means of our own Baptism, God connects us to Christ’s life and death and resurrection to life. And since Christ is our divine and perfect Substitute – standing in our stead in all that He does – what He does is accounted to us by grace through faith ... what He receives likewise.

To put it another way, you also are ***Revealed as Beloved of the Father in Holy Baptism***. You also are God’s ***dear child***. For all that Christ has, He willingly shares with you. You are coheirs with Christ [ROM 8.17] – beloved sons all! Thus, when the Father’s voice from heaven says: ***This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased*** [MT 3.17], it applies first and foremost to Jesus ... but it also applies to you. When God the LORD says in ISAIAH: ***I have called you in righteousness, I will take you by the***

*hand and keep you* [ISA 42.6], it applies first to His Incarnate Son ... but also to you. *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* [GAL 3.27] For that reason, I say that you also are *Revealed as Beloved of the Father in Holy Baptism.*

Visualize with me these Biblical scenes. *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.* [REV. 22.1-2] *Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ... And when Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on Him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased."* [MT 3.13, 1-17] *But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.* [JN 19.34] *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. 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.* [ROM 6.3-5] *They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He Who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their Shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water.* [REV 7.14-17]

The river of the water of life flows from heaven into the Baptismal waters that pour forth from our Savior's side, poured over us, uniting us to Christ and His death and resurrection in such a way that we are drawn through the waters safely into heaven, where we shall worship forever our Lord *Revealed as Beloved of the Father in Holy Baptism.*

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]