

Epiphany 1 – Baptism of Our Lord

Joining Jesus...Through Baptism

Mark 1:4-11

1/14/18

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Pt 1:2)

Ephesians 3:2-12

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

When I was in school I remember learning about Ponce de León and his search for the Fountain of Youth – a life-restoring, life-giving fountain. In 1513, Ponce de León led a voyage from the Caribbean to explore Florida in search of the mysterious land of Bimini. He had heard reports from the native inhabitants of the Caribbean islands that the land of Bimini held the fountain he was looking for. Obviously, Ponce de León never found the Fountain of Youth.

The problem is, he was looking in the wrong place – it's right here! Obviously, the baptismal font is not exactly a "fountain of youth" on par with the legendary fountain Ponce de León supposedly hunted for in Florida – no, it's so much better!

It sure doesn't look that way, does it? There's nothing that looks particularly fantastic, particularly special. But, if you open the lid...no, nothing too fantastic there either, just a bowl to fill with water. Ah, that's the key, right? It's the water! No, the water just comes from the faucet. And even if Coors says Rocky Mountain spring water is better, it's still just water.

You can understand why, unfortunately, many people – even most Christians – think Baptism isn't all that important, that it doesn't really do anything. It looks so ordinary, so plain. You know, if God wanted us to treasure Baptism so much, he could have made it a bit flashier.

But that's just it, God doesn't work through flashy. Think of the Second Lesson today. God showed his power in the earthquake. But that display of power created only dread and terror in the heart of the jailor. So, if you want to see God's power, and want to see it in nature, that's fine; but then be ready only to tremble and quake in fear and terror.

It was the glory of forgiveness brought to the jailor through the gospel in Holy Baptism that brought life and joy and peace to the jailor. So trust me, here, while it may not look all that fantastic, you find the greatest water of life. Here, God brings you to *Join Jesus...through Baptism*.

John had been baptizing people in the Jordan River for quite some time when Jesus came. Mark wrote, **"And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin."** People came to see John and to hear John preach from all over Israel. No one like John had been seen in Israel for hundreds of years. Many listened to what John had to say and were baptized – their sins forgiven through Holy Baptism by the One whose coming John was proclaiming.

It was then that Jesus came. It seems like it was almost a secret that Jesus was baptized. It doesn't appear as though anyone else was there except John. And Mark talks about it like it wasn't such a big deal. **"At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan."** But Jesus' baptism was a huge deal! First of all, think of who baptism is for. Mark tells us that John's was a

“baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” John’s baptism was for sinners, just like it still is today. John’s baptism was a means of grace God had given his people to wash away sin, to give forgiveness, to take away guilt. So, Jesus didn’t need Baptism. In fact, in Matthew’s account, we’re told John objected to Jesus even being baptized. He was sinless. As the eternal Son of God, Jesus did not inherit original sin as you and I and everyone else has. From conception to the moment of his death, not once did Jesus commit sin either – not one selfish thought, not one hurtful word, not one loveless action.

Still, Jesus was baptized, but why? There at his baptism, Jesus put himself in your place, your sinless Substitute willingly associated himself with sinful wretches like you and me. He put himself in your shoes so he could one day stand in your place on the cross to suffer the punishment you deserve. There, at his Baptism by John in the Jordan, Jesus declared himself to be the Savior, the one who would stand in the place of all sinners. Right there, on the banks of the Jordan River, Jesus began the course which would take him to the cross, where he would give his life as a ransom for all people – for you.

Jesus was baptized because you need Baptism. Jesus was baptized to be your Savior, he was baptized to show you that he is with you through thick and thin, that your cause is his cause, that your eternal welfare was his sole goal and desire.

What happened next was entirely in line with the meaning of Jesus’ baptism. **“As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”** What was beginning there at Jesus’ baptism was such a momentous occurrence that God had to speak. And what an amazing announcement it was! There, after John baptized Jesus, the entire Trinity showed itself; the Spirit covered and filled the lowly human nature of the Son, and the Father attested to his favor in all that his Son is and is about to do.

It was this baptism of Jesus, and everything Jesus did in the next three years, that now gives your baptism meaning, it makes your baptism the Fountain of Youth, the water of life...everything for you!

Think about what you see when a Baptism happens here in church. You see a couple beaming parents bringing their cute little baby. It’s a real Kodak moment, it’s cute, it’s precious. That’s what you see. But now think about what’s really happening! Think about what God sees, think about what God is doing!

It helps to remember what God sees in every single human being. David wrote in Psalm 51, **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me”** (Psalm 51:5). Paul wrote in Ephesians 2, **“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins”** (Ephesians 2:1). That’s what God sees when parents bring a child for baptism. He sees a dead in sin enemy, a sinner who deserves his condemnation. That’s what God saw in each one of us, too. But then, wonder of wonders, Jesus steps to the side of that child. Jesus takes that child through his death and resurrection and delivers him to the Father. That’s what Jesus has done for you.

Your Baptism has connected you to Jesus in his death and resurrection. Paul wrote to the Romans, **“don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life”** (Romans 6:3,4).

When you were baptized, you died. Your sinful nature was put to death, it was nailed to the cross with Jesus. You died and have been raised to life – real life, life with God through faith. You were brought to life with Jesus. You were given his life, you were given his perfect life. You were given his place in heaven, his place in the family of God.

At your Baptism, all the great blessings of Jesus' Baptism and all that he accomplished and earned through his work as God's Anointed Savior became yours. All the forgiveness you needed for the impossible burden of sin's guilt became yours. All the new life you needed for your blind, dead, God-hating souls became yours. All the eternal life you needed became yours. Through Holy Baptism you became God's and all that is God's became yours!

What a miracle you see in Baptism! Whenever you witness a Baptism, you see a child rescued from the jaws of death and hell! You see a child safely placed in the arms of the Father in heaven! The miracle you see in Baptism is hidden. It's a mystery hidden behind what seems so ordinary but at the same time is so miraculously true! The entire Triune God showed himself in your Baptism: the Spirit covered you and came to dwell in you; the Son presented you to his Father as one for whom he did all of his work; the Father is well pleased with you because of what his Son has done for you.

Now heaven has been torn open before you! That way which once stood eternally barred from you because of your sin has been thrown open! Your sin has been washed away in Holy Baptism! You have been given the gift of faith through Holy Baptism! What a blessing God has given to you in Holy Baptism!

Do you see why I said Baptism is better than any Fountain of Youth. Baptism does more than simply prolong your life. It gives you a loving heavenly Father who is with you every day of your life. It gives you strength to face the challenges of each day because you are God's child and he is with you. It gives you the ability to say no to sin because God has put your sinful nature to death, and given you his strength to resist temptation when it tries to come back into your life. Best of all, Baptism gives you eternal life. By connecting you to Jesus through faith, heaven is open and your heavenly Father is waiting to welcome you there.

In 1521, Ponce de León died. Obviously, he never found the Fountain of Youth. He never found waters that preserved his youthfulness. But you have, you have found the real Fountain of Youth – you have been baptized. After the offering this morning, we are going to sing a wonderful Baptism hymn. It's from the Supplement, and I know it's a little challenging, but it's definitely worth learning. That entire hymn reminds you of the comfort you have – for life and for eternity – in being able to say, *"I am baptized into Christ!"* The first verse says, *"God's own child, I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ! He, because I could not pay it, gave my full redemption price. Do I need earth's treasures many? I have one worth more than any that brought me salvation free, lasting to eternity."* While it doesn't look flashy, while its glory is hidden behind what seems so ordinary, there is nothing worth comparing to the gift of Baptism you have received.

Amen

Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. (Ps 72:18-19)

Amen