

Baptism!  
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22  
January 10, 2010

Today we recall the baptism of our Lord Jesus. It's one of those passages and acts by Jesus that can be confusing. If John the Baptist was baptizing people as he called them to repentance, and Jesus was sin-free and therefore had no sins to confess, then why did he need to be baptized?

I think understanding Jesus' choice to undergo baptism can be understood through his own words and those spoken by the Father.

After Jesus was baptized the Father's voice from heaven proclaimed, "This is my son, in whom I am well pleased."

*This is my son:* from Psalm 2:7, it can also be translated *today I reveal you as my son*. For the psalmist and those who read the psalms in Jesus' day, this was a description of the messianic king.

*In whom I am well pleased:* from Isaiah 42:1, refers to the servant of the Lord whom has been anointed with God's Spirit. In this statement Jesus becomes associated with the suffering servant.

Those are the words of the Father, but what about the Son.

The story in Matthew has Jesus telling John the Baptist that he needed to be baptized to fulfill all righteousness. In the Bible, righteousness doesn't mean what you may think it means. I would guess that most would say it has to do with right living or godly actions.

However, the truth is that in the Bible, righteousness means something different. The word used in the New Testament is based in a Hebrew word that speaks to mercy, compassion, and active intervention on behalf of the weak. The righteousness of God is a kind of justice in which God intervenes out of concern for the needy, particularly the spiritually needy. In the New Testament, the OT meaning of righteousness has added to it the notion that God's act on behalf of the needy is manifested in his redemptive, saving will being accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

All of this is to say that at the moment of Jesus' baptism his calling was affirmed and officially initiated. The course of his life was changed forever. Surely at his baptism he realized not only that he was the anointed son of God, but he became painfully aware of the course that lay before him – a path that would lead to a cross.

The time of Jesus' baptism was a time of new life direction and purpose. It was a time for the righteousness of God to be lived out in the daily activity of the person we know as Jesus of Nazareth.

This morning I want you to think about your baptism. At your baptism, not only did God wash away your sins, but he began a new work in you. You became part of the church universal – your life became linked to the righteousness of God. Once you accepted Jesus as your Savior, your life became inextricably linked with His. And just as the Father had something the Son needed to do, God has something for you to do.

*What is God calling you to do for the Kingdom? Who is God calling you to serve?* I want to challenge you with that question today. Too often we convince ourselves that being a Christian is like being in a civic club. There are officers who take care of the official stuff. There are the really active folks who do most of the work raising money and working community events. But most folks just come to the meetings and enjoy the dinner.

The church is not a civic club. None of you were baptized into new life as a pew-sitter or covered-dish dinner eater. To use a sports analogy, there is no second string in the Kingdom of God. You are either doing your job, or your job isn't getting done.

Now, the reality is most Christians don't know what God is calling them to do. I believe that is because of one of three things: 1) they don't care to find out – they are apathetic and just assume someone else will pick up their slack; 2) they are scared to find out for fear they will fail; or, 3) they are scared to find out for fear that it will mean a change in their life.

If one of these three describes you, take it to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you and enliven your spirit. Talk to a fellow servant and see how they came to embrace their calling.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, your life is slipping past you. Some of you look at your life and feel as if life is something that happens *to* you. Others feel as they look over the past year(s) they can't see a way that they have made a positive impact on someone around them. I want you to know that life need not be passive. You need not feel irrelevant to others. God is calling you into an exciting, joy-filled life in Christ Jesus. By virtue of your baptism, your old life is gone and a new life is birthed in its place. If your baptism happened when you were an infant, you will need to confirm faith in Christ yourself. And that life in Christ is available to everyone.

The last point I want to lift up is this: For the Christian your calling (or vocation) never ends within the Kingdom of God. There is no such thing as a retired Christian. You might be a retired engineer, or a retired school teacher, or even a retired clergyman; but you never retire from your calling as given to you by God. The old excuse we many times hear in the church,

“I’ve done my time in such and such ministry. Let someone else do it now,” doesn’t wash. Your calling by God may change, but your service to His Kingdom is never finished. So, look at the bulletin announcements and seek your calling. Check out the newsletters and emails and seek your calling. Bathe them all in prayer as you read and as you have conversations on the phone and face-to-face with other Sunrisers and people in the community. God is calling you. Just as he called Jesus into the life of the suffering servant, he calls you into the service of others as well.

What is God calling you to do? What are you going to tell Him when He calls?