

Sermon for the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord

“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Mat 3:15).

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

If you were a first-century Jew,

then John the Baptist

would have been preaching exactly what you had been waiting to hear...

Because

these folks were in a world of hurt!

They

were suffering under terrible oppression and sickness and heartache,

and they were

absolutely helpless to save themselves from their demons, their illnesses, their oppressors, their shame, their guilt, their failures, their sin...

just

like you and me.

But God

had promised a solution for their problems, and for yours as well -

literally, a Savior who would come and make everything right.

A King

would come with power to bring salvation *and judgment* -

a baptism with the Holy Spirit *and* with fire.

He was coming with

His winnowing fork in hand to cast out the bad guys and to establish His Kingdom of peace forever and ever.

And

now, according to John, that King had come, and the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand!

Indeed, God's promised Savior had come in flesh and blood, exactly as promised -

born of a virgin,
just as God has said -

delivered
out of Egypt, just as it was written -

known as a Nazarene,
just as it had been foretold by the OT prophets.

And

now, taking the Divine Initiative, Jesus, the Savior of Promise, had come "from Galilee to the Jordan to John" (Matt 3:13) -

to the Jordan river -
that historic threshold of God's promised Kingdom -

that
watery point of entry into the Promised Land...

Jesus
came to meet His people in that very place where they had once been gathered to new life as God's people and were now gathering to confess their sin and their need for a Savior.

And in this person of
Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of Heaven - the Rule and Reign of God, had now broken
into history-and-time-and-space.

And

as this King of Glory walks up to John and says, "Baptize Me,"

John's
brain explodes...

Well,
not exactly... But think about it: John is the last of God's appointed OT
Prophets -

So he KNOWS what he's talking about!

And here he's been
proclaiming the salvation of God in Jesus who would come in POWER -

a Jesus so superior
to and mightier than himself that he was not worthy to perform even the most
menial service for Him (Matt 3:11) (Gibbs 178).

And
yet, this Savior of the World, this King of Kings and Lord of Lords comes to
John,

NOT wielding His axe or His winnowing fork,

but
requesting a Baptism of repentance...

Is
it any wonder John starts asking questions?

"What's
the deal, Lord?"

If anything, I should be baptized by YOU -

I
must decrease and you must increase -

You're the sinless
Lamb of God... and you come to me? For baptism? For repentance?

You
want to take your place in the water?

You want to get in the mud with us?

You
want to associate Yourself with our SIN?

To which Jesus
basically responds, "Yeah... that IS the plan *for now*."

Now,
the language here is very interesting,

for Jesus actually
uses the word Matthew has been using over and over to refer to God's plan of
salvation according to the OT Scriptures.

Jesus says, "Let it
be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to *FULFILL* all righteousness"
(Matt 3:15).

And
this word FULFILL actually means "to enact the Divine Scriptural plan of
salvation (Gibbs 179)."

It means sticking to
the Script and getting the job done according to the plan foretold by the
prophets.

And here, Jesus is
the One who FULFILLS that plan exactly the way it's been spelled out in the
Scriptures!

True,
Jesus IS the Mighty Savior and Judge who will come in power on the Last Day.

But *for now*,
He is the Suffering Servant who does not cry aloud or lift up His voice (Isa
42:2).

For now, the
Script calls for something entirely different, and *for now*, this
mind-bending idea of Jesus - Immanuel -

God with us humbling
Himself and submitting Himself to a baptism for sinners IS the way that "all
righteousness" will be fulfilled.

In
other words, as the rule and reign of heaven breaks into time and space for us
and for our salvation,

it looks like Jesus submitting to John's Baptism.

Why?
Because it shows you exactly how Jesus saves you from your sins.

It shows you exactly
how God's Kingdom comes, how God's will is done, and how His righteousness,
His
plan of salvation has been fulfilled for you.

Jesus
fulfills all righteousness by taking your humanity unto Himself -

by taking your sin upon Himself -

by taking your place
in the water of repentance, and ultimately by taking your place on the cross.

Jesus
took your place under God's wrath to suffer and die and pay the price for your
sin.

But of
course, He rose again from the dead, for He had no sin of His own,
and therefore death had no claim on Him.

And
soon He *will* come again in power to judge the living and the dead.

And you may rest
assured that on that great and terrible Day of the Lord,

He will indeed come
with His Holy Spirit to gather His saints, and with the fire of His wrath to
destroy His enemies.

But *for*
now? For now, the sinless Lamb of God has taken your place in sin and
offered up His life as the ransom for you.

And THAT is the journey we see beginning at His Baptism.

Our
Lord's Baptism appoints Him to the cross where His reign and rule,
where His glory and His love,
where His
righteousness and His plan of salvation are fully revealed.

Which is why, when
John starts to short-circuit, Jesus simply says, "Let it be this way for now,
because this is the
way to fulfill all righteousness- to get the job done according to the Script."

And
when John hears this Word of our Lord, what does he do? He consents (v15).

He relents and turns
away from his own expectations to go the way of Christ according to the Script
- according to His Word -

just
like Mary who said, "Let it be to me as You have said..."

Faith
simply nods along and receives God's salvation the way He provides it,
no matter how strange or improbable it may appear.

And how
do we *know* this is how God's salvation has come for us?

We know, because the
moment John consents and baptizes Jesus,
the heavens open and
God basically says, "That's what I'm talking about!"

The
Father shows up with that part of the "Script" that we read from Isaiah this
morning that says, "Behold My servant, whom I uphold...

I have put My Spirit upon Him... (Isa 42:1)" -

The heavens open,
the Spirit of God comes down like a dove, and a voice from heaven literally
proclaims,

*"This
is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased (v17)."*

And in
that moment, God not only verifies that Jesus is in fact His Son,

but that He is now
bringing His salvation to the world exactly according to plan-

a plan that calls
for Jesus to take the sin of the world upon Himself and pay the price on the
cross -

a plan that unfolds
in the water of the Jordan and now continues in the water of your own baptism
where YOU receive the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection (Rom 6:5) for
yourself.

And
perhaps you, like John, may be a little puzzled by God's plan... especially if
things are still going poorly in your life.

You may wonder why things aren't going the way you'd expect if God had really come and rescued you...

But *for now*, everything is going according to God's plan -

For now, Jesus has united you with His death through Baptism and has promised that you will also be united with Him in His resurrection (Rom 6:5-11).

For now, He comes for you in the most strange and unexpected ways - through Words spoken, through His Body and Blood given in bread and wine.

For now, He comes for you in this place where WE gather in repentance like they did at the Jordan to confess your sins and receive Him who comes in flesh and blood to take away your sin, to open your eyes,

and to rescue you from your prison of sin and death (Is 42:7).

And when you, like John, simply consent to receive Jesus on His terms and to have His rescue according to His Script -

when you simply nod along with God's plan *for now* and trust in the promises of your Baptism, then you may rest assured that *all* righteousness -

Christ's righteousness for your life and salvation - will be fulfilled.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Preached by Pastor Holowach

Sermon Text: Matthew 3:13-17.