

January 8, 2017
The Baptism of Our Lord
Matthew 3:13-17

Last month in Italy somebody found an old car covered in dust with miscellaneous junk being stacked and stored on top of it. No big deal, right? Well, this car was a BMW M1; of which less than 500 were ever produced, and it had less than 4,600 miles on it! Apparently the owner had purchased it, drove it for a while, then stuck it in the garage and forgot all about it. Once it's restored, it should fetch upwards of \$500,000.

It sounds crazy that anybody would do such a thing with such a treasure; just tuck it away and forget about it. But many, many Christians do the exact same thing with something that is infinitely more valuable—their Holy Baptism.

Today we celebrate the baptism of Jesus Christ by John the Baptist in the Jordan river. What a baptism it was. *“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.’”*

This is a really big event! I mean, how far back to you have to look to find God Almighty saying this about a human being? You really have to go back to God looking over all creation in Genesis chapter one and considering it very good. Since the fall into sin nobody was good; nobody well-pleased God. But Jesus arrives, grows and at His baptism the heavens open and God's pleasure with this righteous man, His Son, is declared.

And isn't this what each of us desires from God for ourselves? David nailed it in Psalm 51 when he said, *“For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.”* We know our evil-stained life before God is nothing that pleases Him, and we wish the situation was different.

We want God to look at us and be well pleased. But no matter how hard we try, we know we never get there.

So how priceless is the gift of Holy Baptism!!!??? Jesus declares, *“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.”* He tells Nicodemus this gift accomplishes a second birth making human being suitable for God’s presence; *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”* St. Peter writes, *“Baptism...now saves you.”*

Yet, let me ask you, before you came in here this morning and saw the title on the back of the bulletin, when was the last time you thought about baptism? When was the last time you pondered the fact that you are have been/are/stand baptized? I’m hoping it’s recent, but I’m betting it has been a while.

We tend to treat Holy Baptism like that BMW. It was something once way back there in my memory, or more often in the memory of my parents. I know it happened, I know it’s there, but I don’t really ever consider taking it out for a spin. It’s in the theological garage, collecting dust with all my confirmation and youth gathering memories stacked on top of it.

This is not how it should be! Your Holy Baptism is a priceless gift God has given to you. All of us should be taking it out for a spin every waking hour. More correctly, our baptismal reality should be what is driving us every minute of the day. Paul writes excitedly, *“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.”*

Holy Baptism, commended and commanded by the risen Christ to His people just before His ascension to the Father, is a God-given connection to the great exchange—our sin and

condemnation for Christ's perfection and righteousness. It's all in there. The death on the cross dragging our sins to the grave and the resurrection from the dead without their damning stain!

We have newness of life—present tense—in which we may walk this very day!

How do we do this? Well, there's a whole lot involved and I invite you read, reread and read again the next several chapters of Romans and ponder those words for what this means, and then start reading at chapter 12 for how this reality is lived out. But today I'm giving you the simple version.

The "oldness of life" before the gifts of the cross conveyed in Holy Baptism was what? It was living with guilt, living under the burden of the law and our failure to keep it. It was living under God's displeasure and wrath. It was a life in which we were unable to please God.

But you can look at Christ's baptism and know that He changed that reality. You know, I know and even John the Baptist knew the Jesus didn't need that baptism. He has no sin to wash away! But He does it to "fulfill all righteousness" or maybe better understood, to do all things rightly. Do what rightly? Do those things in the human flesh that will redeem the flesh for God; that's Christ's mission!

So Jesus receives baptism and the heavens open, the Holy Spirit is conveyed and the Father pronounces favor upon the Son. This is done in human flesh that all human flesh might receive this same blessing!

So this "newness of life" conveyed in baptism is a life knowing that the Father daily looks upon you and declares, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." "This is my beloved daughter in whom I am well pleased." I know I've preached those words before, but they need repeating less we devalue the precious treasure God has given. Standing by faith in your Holy Baptism, you stand in Christ and in His Baptism, receiving God's favor, receiving

God's pardon of your sins through the cross and the receiving the righteousness of His beloved Son's perfect human life.

This newness of life is freedom from the fear of condemnation of your sins and a living of a life that finally can be and is pleasing to God. It is a knowledge that the sins into which you daily stumble do not have the power to condemn you. It is certainty in your faithful repentance that God looks upon you and is well pleased.

But this newness of life is also strength in the face of temptation! You get to walk around knowing God is well pleased with you. When you're faced with an opportunity and inclination toward some evil, how long is that going to last if you can remember that God is well pleased with you? I mean, are you really going to want to do anything opposed to the present reality of having God's favor? I doubt it. You'll have strength to rejoice and turn a different direction and walk away in your newness of life.

To some of you that may sound somewhat pithy, because you are wracked with the guilt of your repeated sins and your reality seems dark and mired in badness. Well hear this, by God's promise and power there is something with you in that darkness—your Holy Baptism. Appeal to God for forgiveness not because you'll try harder or be better, but because He promised you Holy Baptism saves you! Moses and the prophets prayed God to remember His promises many times and God always did; when you turn in faith to His promise in your baptism He always does.

That silly, sacred act with some water and words at the font, it does what God promises it does because it was all God doing it, and He doesn't do shoddy work! Baptism forgives. Baptism saves. It is a holy work of God with effect enduring unto eternity! Christ accomplished it and Christ commanded it!

Don't leave it in the garage. Every morning and every night remember it, appeal to it, react to its reality. The treasure stands yours. Live in its newness of life.

Amen.