

January 11, 2026
The Baptism of Our Lord

“Baptized into Us, Baptized into Him”

Isaiah 42:1-9

God speaks through the prophet Isaiah, *“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.”*

Of course we understand this prophecy to be about Jesus. St. Matthew quotes this prophecy in regard to the Messiah. But believe it or not, in the immediate Old Testament context this is about God’s calling of the people of Israel to be a light among the nations. Israel was to be God’s servant, a beacon of Yahweh’s love in the midst of a fallen world. Israel, of course, failed miserably in this calling. They chose the idolatry of false gods over faithfulness to and proclamation of the one, true God of creation. You might look at the nation of Israel and consider it the son that disappointed God.

Yet this is the very reason that Christ’s baptism is such a big deal. From that corrupt and faithless people God’s promise of redemption still sprang up—the servant Son that Israel failed to be.

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Back at the seminary Jesus is often referred to as “All of Israel boiled down to one.” This is because whereas Israel continually failed to be faithful, failed to keep the Law of God, failed to fulfil God’s design for them, Jesus stepped in and did it all perfectly. Not only that, He did so in their place; did so according to God’s promise of a righteous branch, a Savior.

How tragic then it is that the Jews chose to reject Him, accuse His right and just teaching to be blasphemy and to have Him crucified at the hands of the Gentiles. And yet, we know that was the plan of salvation, that this perfect Son would be the stand-in for all people under God’s just wrath and punishment so that those who deserve no mercy might receive it...because God is love and desires to be merciful.

In Christ’s baptism we see a picture of God’s love and mercy.

John is absolutely correct in His objection: *“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”* Jesus has no need for baptism. John’s baptism is one of repentance in preparation for Christ’s arrival. Jesus is that Christ, and He has no sins of which to repent. Baptism for Him is out of the question.

But Jesus counters: *“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”* In love and mercy Jesus is intent on entering into this baptism to identify with sinners and for the purpose of bringing them His perfect righteousness—a standing they cannot hope to attain without His divine intervention. Having done so, having joined with sinners in this manner, the Father then speaks as the Holy Spirit descends, *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*

These words are spoken over Jesus, after He has joined with sinners in John’s baptism. Thus, these are spoken over all of Israel, boiled down to one in Jesus. Jesus is the promise in which Abraham believed, and it was counted to him as righteousness. Though they may not have known it, this Jesus is the object of the faith of all those people in the Old Testament who trusted

God's Word and looked for their deliverance from sin in the coming Messiah. In the waters of the Jordan the righteousness of God has publicly arrived.

Now of course, this joining to sinners reaches its climax on the cross where, standing in our place, Jesus receives the wrath and pays the blood-price in human flesh for humanity's sin. But risen to life in victory, what is it that Jesus gifts the world? *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them..."* Jesus gives us this gift—not the gift of His divine righteousness joining to our sinfulness as happened in the Jordan River. That is now turned on its head. This baptism is us, washed of our sins, joining with His perfect righteousness through the cross and tomb into a divine eternity!

St. Paul spells this out: *"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."*

Holy Baptism is, of course, a mystery by which God gifts full forgiveness and salvation in simple water and Word. But when I look at Christ's baptism by John I almost see it as Christ being baptized into us and our sin and death in order that we later shall be enabled to be baptized into His righteousness and life! This means our daily reality is just as Luther describes in the Small Catechism: "[Baptism] indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

We by God's grace now being made this new man, or woman as the case may be, now live in a new reality. Yet it's a reality we tend to deny because we still see our sin ever before us. But Holy Scripture is crystal clear on this: we stand made righteous; holy saints, sons and daughters of God in Christ.

Now look at those first four verses of the Isaiah reading I quoted at the top of the sermon. These were spoken as upon the nation of Israel even as they were enmeshed in all sorts of sin and idolatry. And of course, they obviously pointed forward to the perfect suffering servant, Jesus Christ, righteousness incarnate. But in Him, these words are also true spoken over you, the redeemed, baptized believer.

You are God's servant. The Lord holds you up. He has chosen you. His soul delights in you. He has put His spirit upon you. And yes, as a faithful bearer of the Gospel you bring forth God's justice to the nations, speak words that strengthen the weak through which the Spirit kindles and sustains saving faith. You are steadfast in hope, awaiting the day when His justice and righteousness is brought to completion in the new heaven and new earth. In Christ, this is you...not because you're so good but because Christ, into whom you stand baptized, is.

So maybe when you have a dark day and your walk of faith seems to be travelling in the sewer of sin, when you're thing of yourself as a son or daughter who is a disappointment to God, take a moment and read the beginning of Isaiah 42. And when every reasonable brain cell in your head says, "This isn't you, this is only Jesus," say to your soul, "Christ was baptized into me and I stand baptized into Him. This Is Him, and He says this is me."

Washed in that baptism, restored by His promise of grace, go forth as this servant, this child of God, living the day to your loving God's glory.

Amen.