

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

We heard part of our Gospel text back in Advent, with its beginning of the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, found in John the Baptist's preaching. John prepared the way for Jesus' coming. John himself was not the point; Jesus was. *"After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie."* The point is always Jesus.

In fact, if you've not come here to church to have fellowship with Christ, you've come to the wrong place. That's what the holy Christian church is. It is the "communion of saints" in the one Body of Christ — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, all joined into Christ's Body in the waters of Holy Baptism (1 Cor. 12:13).

As we heard last Sunday, Christ's coming was for all people. The Son descended from His Father's side to become flesh. His incarnation connected Him with all mankind, without distinction of nationality or sex, status or wealth, or age.

Similarly today, by His Baptism, Jesus marks the beginning of His work of salvation — again for the world. Jesus, though without sin Himself, here identifies with fallen mankind. The only requirement for us is that we be sinners, and that identification is not a difficult one, for when it comes to sin, *"all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one'"* (Rom. 3:9-10). And *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23).

Yes, *"For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin"* (2 Cor. 5:21) — that's Jesus, for that is in part why Jesus was baptized by John. It wasn't so that His sins might be washed away; it wasn't to lead Him to repentance; it wasn't that He needed forgiveness. It was so that this Servant could bear our griefs and carry our sorrows (Isa. 53:4). It was so that this Lamb could bear the sins of the world (John 1:29). It was to effect the so-called "great exchange" — *"so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Cor. 5:21).

Therefore, at Jesus' baptism, the Father assures Him: *"You are my beloved Son."* Of course, Jesus is God's Son, "begotten of the Father from eternity," this is true (Luther, Small Catechism, Explanation Apostles' Creed, 2<sup>nd</sup> Article), but He is more than that. Jesus becomes the Father's beloved son of the line of Adam, a man, who does not fall prey to the devil's wiles, who is tempted and does not sin, who does the Father's pleasure as the first Adam was created to do, but failed (as do all the rest of Adam's progeny born in the natural way). But Jesus, born of woman under the law (Gal. 4:4) is THE doer of the law, as St. Paul describes, *"it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified"* (Rom. 2:13) — Jesus is the doer the law, doing it for us to redeem us who are under the law's just condemnation (Gal. 4:5).

Second, the Father assures Jesus that He is well pleased with His beloved Son: “*in You, I have become well pleased*” (Voelz translation, James W. Voelz, *Concordia Commentary: Mark 1:1 – Mark 8:26*, 122), for the Father is well pleased with the quest that Jesus had just begun.

That quest is the restoration of the creation and of mankind to paradise, for although the creation had been corrupted and men fell into sin, God was not pleased to abandon them to their wickedness. No, it wasn't that way in the beginning. The creation was good. “*God saw that the light was good.*” God gathered the waters into seas and “*let the dry land appear.*” “*And God saw that it was good*” (Gen. 1:9-10). God let “*the earth sprout vegetation.*” “*And God saw that it was good*” (Gen. 1:11-12). And at the end of all His creating, “*God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good*” (Gen. 1:31). The heavens and the earth and everything in it ... very good. Man and woman made without sin ... very good. God was well pleased.

Thus, this is what Jesus came to restore. And this He accomplished by His cross and resurrection, the end goal of a quest begun at His baptism. “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). Of course, the fullness of that restoration won't happen until the end comes, but it has surely been accomplished even now. And we now await Jesus' return when God again will dwell “*with man,*” when “*God himself will be with [His people] as their God,*” when “*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore,*” for these are former things that will have passed away in the new creation (Rev. 21:3-4), for it will have come to pass that the Father's beloved Son will have made “*all things new*” (Rev. 21:5).

Moreover, we poor sinners will get to participate in this new creation because, by the beloved Son's own institution of baptism, we are made a part of Him. As I said earlier, we are incorporated into Him, made a member of His body. This is the church. Baptized into Christ Jesus by the Spirit, we have been baptized into this paradise-restoring quest that Jesus performed on our behalf. We have been baptized into His death that we might be raised with Him — and that, to “*walk in newness of life.*” There it is again ... new creation language ... “*the body of sin ... brought to nothing, ... no longer ... enslaved to sin, ... set free from sin, ... death no longer [having] dominion over [Christ or us], ... [for we are] dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*”

In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul is even more explicit: “*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come*” (2 Cor. 5:17). And you surely know that being “*in Christ*” is baptismal language, as it is in Paul's assertion that “*in him we ... become the*

*righteousness of God*” (2 Cor. 5:21). And all this is empowered by this God-pleasing quest that Jesus went on, starting with His baptism, completed in His cross and resurrection. As St. Paul says, “*All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself ...; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them*” (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

Dear friends, when we gather in Church, we do so as the baptized, as part of Christ's body, rejoicing in our salvation in Christ Jesus, rejoicing in the new creations that we are and one day will enjoy in its fullness.

Much of what we do in the Divine Service here week in and week out is meant to remind us of God's grace to us in our baptisms. When we recite the creed, we think on our baptismal confession. Every time we invoke the name of the Triune God — in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit — we're remembering our baptisms; and when we make the sign of the cross, we're rightly remembering not only that sign made over us in our baptisms, but we're also remembering Him who by His cross empowered our baptisms. When you approach the altar to receive Christ's body and blood today, you might make the sign of the cross — you don't have to, but you might — remembering that it should only be by baptism and the faith it produced in you that makes you bold to approach God's altar and commune with Christ there.

So, let us rejoice today in God's beloved Son as we wait for His return and our reentry into paradise; let us rejoice in His redeeming work begun at His baptism; and let us rejoice in the recreating and renewing work done by the Holy Spirit in our own baptisms.

No pressure, but you can make the sign of the cross now if you want in remembrance of your baptism ... In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.