

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

We celebrated the Baptism of Our Lord last Sunday, and the baptism of Jesus is still in view today, this time from St. John's gospel. We don't witness Jesus' baptism today; today's text begins with "*the next day.*"

Thus, Jesus returns to the place where John was baptizing, and where John had the benefit of those Divine epiphanies that accompanied Jesus' baptism, the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Father's voice from heaven (Matt. 3:16-17). These epiphanies revealed things about Jesus to John.

That's not to say that John did not already know who Jesus was. He surely did; He was Jesus' cousin. John's mother was a relative of the Blessed Virgin, Luke reports. You remember that after the angel Gabriel had announced to Mary that she would bear the long-anticipated Messiah, the Son of God, shortly after the divine Christ child had been conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit, Mary traveled to the land of Judah to visit her relative Elizabeth. Elizabeth was herself great with child — with a son who would come to be known as John the Baptist.

And here Luke reports again of the Holy Spirit's work, this one revelatory. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth greeted her younger relative, calling her "*the mother of my Lord*" (Luke 1:43), and her son, six months gestated in his mother's womb, leaped for joy at Mary's greeting (Luke 1:41).

John knew Jesus. John knew that he was not worthy even to untie Jesus' sandals. As we heard last Sunday, John knew that he needed to be baptized by Jesus. He knew that Jesus was the one "*mightier than*" he (Matt. 3:11, 14). But John learned more at Jesus' baptism. John learned that, more than being the Christ, Jesus was the Son of God, who would baptize not merely with water for repentance, but with "*the Holy Spirit and with fire*" (Matt. 3:11; John 1:33).

Yes, John learned that Jesus was the eternal Word of God, "*the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth,*" and that this Word had become flesh and was dwelling among us (John 1:1-3, 14).

That's what John bears witness to. "*This is he [Jesus] of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'*" Yes, as we just reviewed, as a man, Jesus came along after John; Jesus was born six months after John was. But that's not what John is talking about. Rather John is saying something that he would later repeat with different words: "*He must increase, but I must decrease*" (John 3:30). Here he is saying: this man, Jesus, has **become** superior to him, because Jesus **was** always superior. From the beginning Jesus was the first.

John the Baptist here is using two verbs just as the Evangelist John did earlier: "to be" and "to become or come into being." These verbs hearken back to the first

verses of John. “*In the beginning **was** the Word,*” — was — “*and the Word **was** with God,*” — same verb ... was — “*and the Word **was** God*” — same verb again ... was. “*This one **was** in the beginning with God*” — same verb again. The Word preexisted the beginning; He is timeless and eternal.

But then the verb changes. “*All things through him **came into being***” — different verb “came into being.” The Word didn’t come into being; He always **was** — “before all worlds.” He was the one “by whom all things were made,” we confess (Nicene Creed). On the other hand, something did come into being, namely, His flesh received from the Virgin Mary — John 1:14, “*the Word **became** flesh*”; the eternal Word assumed humanity into His divine self, as we confess (Athanasian Creed).

Yes, this testifies that John had come to understand who Jesus was ... more than the Christ, more than the Son of God, He was the Son of God and the Son of Man. The One “*who [had] sent [John] to baptize with water,*” He revealed it to John, even as the “*Father who is in heaven*” would reveal it to Peter and the disciples, and would enable Peter to confess it (Matt. 16:16-17). And through John and John’s baptism, the Father has made it known to all of Israel, that is, to the church. “Anthems be to Thee addressed, God in man made manifest” (LSB394).

More than that, as John came to know this divine revelation, he came to proclaim salvation in Jesus: “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” For no mere mortal could become a sacrifice of atonement; burnt offerings and sin offerings required a lamb without blemish. No mere mortal is that; no mere mortal could offer up himself, for “*None is righteous, no, not one*” (Rom. 3:10). This lamb had to be a Lamb from God.

We know, too, that divine atonement requires the shedding of blood — for “*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins*” (Heb. 9:22; Lev. 17:11). Suppose for a moment that a righteous person could be found who never sinned. How could the shedding of his blood be a sufficient offering for the sins of the world? It wouldn’t. It would take a God-sized sacrifice for that — it would take a Lamb from God, yes, the “*Lamb of God,*” Jesus Christ. Thus, as Peter writes: “*you were ransomed ... with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot*” (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Thanks be to God for this “Lamb of God’s self-offering” by which He takes on our “human sinfulness” (LSB600:1).

But God is not done effecting our salvation with the sacrifice of His beloved Son, for the good news of our salvation **won** for us must also be revealed to us, that we may come to believe in this Lamb. As you know well, it is only by grace that we are saved through faith, and this faith is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9). As St. Paul says, “*everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*” (Rom. 10:13). And, lest you think this is your doing, he says: “*How then will they call on him in*

whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?’ ... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Rom. 10:14-15, 17).

Thus, the “*next day again*” John pointed his disciples to Jesus, saying: “*Behold, the Lamb of God!*” What had been revealed to John, he was proclaiming to his disciples. They left their teacher John and began to follow the rabbi Jesus — one of them was one who would become one of Jesus’ close Twelve disciples. Sitting at Jesus’ feet for a whole day, these disciples would learn that Jesus was more than a mere rabbi — He was the Messiah, that is, the Christ, for whom they had been waiting.

And they didn’t hold back. In this text, we especially hear of Andrew who was Simon Peter’s brother. Andrew went forth and told Peter about Jesus, and brought him to Jesus. And the process started again. Peter, of course, would become one of Jesus’ closest and boldest disciples, confessing Jesus as the Christ by the revelation of the Father (Matt. 16:16), holding fast to Jesus when others were departing: “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God*” (John 6:68-69), and ultimately proclaiming: “*there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12).

And so it has gone through the years, and continues to this day. The Church lives by this manifestation of Jesus revealed to John as true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary; the Church lives by the proclamation of Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; the Church lives by the revelation of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God; the Church lives as we daily remember our baptism into Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit that we have received; the Church lives as we partake of the body and blood of the Lamb of God, offered up once on a cross, and who comes to us regularly in this sacrament, who takes away our sins.

God grant that we may live always in the light of these epiphanies, and God grant that we too might shine these epiphanies before others that they might also follow Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.