

**January 11, 2015**  
**"The Baptism of Our Lord"**

*"The Hand of God in Jesus' Baptism"*

**MARK 1:4-11**

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*And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. <sup>6</sup> John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." <sup>9</sup> At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

This past week tens of thousands of people descended on Las Vegas for the Consumer Electronics Show. It is here in front of thousands of people and television cameras that electronics companies such as Samsung and Sony introduce their new products that dazzle and amaze. If you have a good product to sell it sure helps to introduce it with lots of fanfare and drama.

In the words we just read to you we see our heavenly Father speaking dramatically from heaven and introducing his Son to the world. "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased." We see the Holy Spirit coming down on Jesus in the form of a dove. We see Jesus stepping into the water to be baptized by John. Everything points to Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, the one whom God has chosen to save us and rescue us.

The early Christians celebrated Jesus' baptism more than they celebrated his birth. One Lutheran publication said, "Short of his crucifixion and resurrection, there is none more important for us than the baptism of Jesus." Today we want to celebrate the baptism of Jesus by seeing, **The Hand of God in Jesus' Baptism.**

**The hand of God in the baptism of John**

We certainly see the hand of God present in the life of John the Baptist. "And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." John was baptizing people. He was washing them with water and combining it with the Word of God to wash away sins. It wasn't just a handful of people who coming to be baptized and have their sin forgiven. It says the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. They confessed their sins. They were baptized by John in the waters of the Jordan River. It wasn't just the hand of John the Baptist that was pouring water on people and speaking God's Word to them, it was the hand of God working through John.

The hand of God was also present when John spoke to the people about Jesus. They may have thought he looked strange but oh how they listened with careful attention as he talked to them about Jesus. He talked about Jesus as someone so great that he was not worthy to stoop down and untie his sandals. He talked about Jesus as some who would come and baptize people with the Holy Spirit. It was John who joyfully told people, Look at Jesus, he is the Lamb of God "who takes away the sin of the world." This did not just happen by chance. God was reaching into the lives of people through the words of John the Baptist and through the baptism he offered.

The hand of God of God that worked through the life of John the Baptist to bring people to Jesus is still working through your life and mine to bring people to Jesus. This past week we were privileged to hear the Branches Band playing in our church. They used music and songs and words to bring us close to Jesus the light of the world. The Gospel of John says of John the Baptist, "He himself was not the light; he came only as witness to the light." Jesus tells us that he is the light of the world. He also calls us the light of the world and the salt of the earth because we have the privilege of helping other people see Jesus. Think of all the ways the hand of God will use you to direct others to Jesus in this new year that unfolds before us.

### **The hand of God in the Baptism of Jesus**

But now let's look more closely at the hand of God in Jesus' Baptism.

"At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan." The King James Version says, "And it came to pass." Things came to pass. They came to happen, not by accident, but as part of God's plan. Jesus wanted to be baptized by John to fulfill the plan of his heavenly Father for his life on this earth. Jesus did not need this blessing of baptism. He was sinless and he was pure. He wanted it as an opportunity "to fulfill all righteousness." He wanted to do everything right to show us that he was stepping into our shoes, taking our sin upon himself and ready to do the job of rescuing us.

To illustrate how eager Jesus was to step in and rescue us. This past week firemen in a suburb west of Chicago rescued a fourteen year old boy who had fallen through the ice on a pond that was near his home. He was walking home from school. He thought because of the extreme cold weather he could cross the frozen pond and it would be safe. Instead he broke through. He cried for help and tried to stay afloat on his back but it would only be a matter of minutes before the icy cold water would claim his life. A neighbor heard the screams and called 911. The fire department responded immediately and were able to rescue the boy with only minutes to spare. One of the firemen said we knew exactly what we were going to do to rescue the boy. They did not even have time to put on their wet suits.

Jesus knew exactly what he needed to do to rescue us. He steps into the waters of the Jordan River to be baptized and fulfill all righteousness. In our Old Testament reading for today we hear Jesus say through Isaiah, "He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver." An arrow that is highly polished is one that is straight and true and hits the mark. Jesus is ready to take on the forces of hell itself, crush Satan and his power and

rescue us. He is ready to assume his position as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

I cannot imagine falling through ice when the temperature is not just below freezing but below zero. How often have we fallen into sin this past week and desperately need Jesus to rescue us? There is no one who can do the job right except for Jesus.

"As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending in the form of a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased."

The heavens were opened to reveal the Holy Spirit coming down on Jesus in the form of the Dove. In the Old Testament prophets, priests and kings were anointed with oil. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism to be the Christ or the Messiah. The name Christ comes from the Greek word "chrio" which means to pour out or anoint. The Hebrew word for Messiah also means the anointed one. Immediately after his baptism, the Holy Spirit who anointed Jesus to be the Christ then sent him out into the desert to be tempted by the devil and win the victory for us. The Holy Spirit wanted Jesus to get the job of saving us done and do it right.

The Father also spoke from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased." Jesus needed to hear that voice of his Father. Being fully human, he needed the words of the Father to strengthen him for the tasks ahead. He needed the assurance that everything was done perfectly up to this point. Well pleased. Later the Father would raise Jesus from the dead as further proof that he accepted the life of Jesus as the perfect payment for my sin.

My heavenly Father cannot say that about your life or mine. Think of the terrible thoughts that come into our hearts and minds as we think bad things of other people, or even fail to trust in the Lord as much as we should. There is no righteousness that we can muster in ourselves as we listen to the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Jesus' life was pure. In that pure life that was pleasing to the Father, we have our source of pardon, cleansing, and removal of all sin. In that pure and sinless life we have a clean robe of righteousness to wear at all times before our God.

### **The hand of God in your baptism**

How can we talk about the hand of God in Jesus' baptism without thinking of the hand of God that reached out to you in a very special way in your baptism? You were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our second lesson says that the jailor and his family were baptized and they were filled with joy because he had come to believe in God. Galatians tells us "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Our baptism miraculously connects us to Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection.

When I heard my brother Charlie had a heart attack in 2008 I called him on the phone and had the privilege of reminding him, "Charlie you have been baptized in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit. Later that year when my mother was in her last days,

I was privileged to say to her, "Mom you have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." I can still see the smile on her face. And today I have the privilege of reminding you that you have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The hand of God is there for you in your baptism putting on Christ, burying you with Christ, giving you the Holy Spirit and forgiving your sins. Baptism is not something we do for God, but something very special that God does for us.

Martin Luther always reminded himself of his baptism with the Latin words, "Baptismus sum" I have been baptized. He was not rejoicing in something he had done for God, but rejoiced in the blessings God had given to him. What a joy it is to celebrate the hand of God in Jesus' baptism and the hand of God in our baptism. Amen.