

Mark 1:4-11
1st Sunday after Epiphany
January 11, 2009

Mark 1:4-11 (New International Version)

4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 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. 6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 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. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

How many of you know the day of your baptism? I can well imagine all of you know your birthday or the birthday of your spouse and children. I would imagine that if you are married you also know the day of your anniversary. It's good that we remember such dates because those are days when God did some mighty things for us. On the day we were born, God gave us the gift of life. On the day we were married, God joined us to our lifelong partner. On the day our children were born God gave us precious bundles of joy. How in all the world could we not remember those days?! If we remember the days on which God did so many other great things, then why wouldn't we want to remember what is arguably the most important day of all--the day God put his seal on us and made us one of us own for time and for eternity--the day we were baptized?!

Today we are going to consider the day on which Jesus was baptized. As we prayerfully consider that let us be encouraged to:

REMEMBER THE BLESSINGS OF BAPTISM!

- I. In his baptism Jesus was winning our salvation,**
- II. In our baptism God gave us salvation.**

As we consider Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River that day, there are so many significant and momentous things that were happening. For example, down through the centuries God had promised a Savior. God gave many clues as to who this Savior would be. He would be an offspring of David. He would be born in Bethlehem. He would be a great prophet. He would heal the sick, shepherd God's people, and offer the perfect sacrifice for salvation. But how would the people know who he was? One way would that he would be identified is he would be anointed by the Spirit of God. That happened at Jesus' baptism. At his baptism Jesus was anointed by the Spirit who came down in the form of a dove. That's one of the important reasons for remembering Jesus' baptism. It assures us that Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One whom God sent to save us.

But there was more. Mark tells us that when the heavens were torn open, and the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus in the form of a dove, a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." This is another reason why it's important to remember Jesus' baptism. In that event God the Father was making it very clear who Jesus was. He wasn't just Mary's Son and he wasn't just a human. The man in the Jordan was the very Son of God, the second person of the Triune God. Having that approval, Jesus was about to begin publicly what his heavenly Father had sent him to do, and that was winning our salvation. This is what is most important to remember about Jesus' baptism.

How so? Although Mark doesn't record it here, Matthew mentions that John first objected to Jesus' request to be baptized. He said, "You want to be baptized by me? I should

be baptized by you." John knew that he was a sinner but Jesus was sinless. But Jesus said, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." What did Jesus mean by that? Jesus wasn't baptized because he needed to be saved. He was baptized because we needed salvation. God wanted sinners to be baptized by John. That was God's will. By obeying his Father's will even regarding baptism Jesus was so completely fulfilling God's law for us to every last detail that we might have the righteousness we need for heaven! Just as he was numbered with sinners while dying on the cross to take away sin, so also he was numbered with sinners in his baptism to provide the righteousness we need.

So remember, if ever you have any doubts about who the Savior is, if ever you have any doubts about the doctrine of the Trinity, if ever any doubts about whether or not all has been done for your salvation, one place you can look for assurance is in the Jordan River. In his baptism Jesus was winning our salvation. Remember that!

II.

But that leads us to that with which we began our sermon--the day of our baptism. Why is it important to remember the day we were baptized? In his baptism Jesus was winning our salvation. In our baptism Jesus gave us salvation. Let's discuss that in light of Jesus' baptism.

First of all, why is being baptized so important? First of all it has to do with who babies are. We bring our babies to baptism because they are conceived and born in sin and so, by nature, they need forgiveness for sins and they lack the righteousness they need for heaven. If anyone here doesn't believe that babies are sinful, just go out to St. Paul cemetery or any cemetery for that matter. There you will find a number of gravestones over the grave of babies. Babies can die because they are sinful.

If they are sinful, where can they receive forgiveness for their sin and the righteousness they need for heaven? They get it from Jesus in baptism. In baptism God gives us the forgiveness Jesus won and Jesus' righteousness. Isn't that reason enough to remember our baptism? It surely is!

But there is more. God not only pours out onto us the righteousness of Christ and gives us forgiveness he gives us the faith to receive that righteousness and forgiveness. And who is the object of our baptismal faith? Is it not Jesus, who was declared to be the Savior at his baptism? By the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and by the Father's acclamation "This is my Son," Jesus was identified as our redeemer! In our baptism, God gives us the faith to believe it! By that faith God says to each of us, "You are my son whom I love."

But there is more. As we hear this account of Jesus' baptism, can you identify all three persons of the Trinity? God the Father spoke from heaven. God the Son was being baptized in the Jordan River. And God the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove. Do you know who was present at your Baptism? Yes, your parents and Godparents and other relatives and friends. But the Triune God was also there. For when the pastor poured water on your head he said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Why is it important to remember all these things about baptism--that God gives us Christ's righteousness and faith to receive that righteousness? Why is it important to know that by that faith we received in Baptism we were received into God's family? The reason it's important to remember these things is because we don't often look or act like the redeemed children of God. Although we have the righteousness of Christ by faith, we still have a sinful nature that wants to do just the opposite of what God wants. When that Old Man in each of us gets control and we fall into sin, how can we know that we are forgiven, how can we know that we are still the redeemed children of God, and when we face the hour of death, what assurance can we have that we will go to heaven when we die? Remember your baptism. There God forgave you. There God made you his own. There God promised you eternal life. That's why it's important to remember our baptism.

What can we do to help remember? Here in church we talk about Baptism often. In the Nicene Creed do we say, "I believe in one baptism for forgiveness of sins? Aren't we encouraged to remember our baptism every time a newborn baby is baptized? Even this new "Gathering Rite on Baptism" will help us remember too. Think also of where the Baptismal font stands. Being front and center it is a constant visible reminder that through baptism we are able to be in God's presence now and forever.

So dear friends on this first Sunday after Epiphany how good it is for us to remember how important baptism is both Jesus' and ours. In his baptism Jesus was winning our salvation. In our baptism he gave that salvation to us. Amen.