

**Sermon Text: Matthew 3:13-17** <sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. <sup>16</sup> When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. <sup>17</sup> And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

**Sermon Theme:** Wonderful Truths for our Lives Revealed at Jesus' Baptism.

In the name of Jesus, who is the promised Lord and Christ, dear fellow redeemed;

At the beginning of each new church year, we customarily hear of John the Baptist, the greater forerunner of Jesus. The Bible accounts of John's ministry tell of him carrying on his important work in the wilderness of Judea, preaching and baptizing. John prepared the Jews for Jesus coming by calling sinners to repentance and inviting them to believe in Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. John could announce such a wonderful invitation, because as he rightly pointed out Jesus was God's appointed sacrificial Lamb who takes away the sins of the world by pouring out His life blood on the cross in atonement for them. John also came baptizing in the name of one true God in order that sinful mankind might receive and enjoy the assurance and guarantee of God's blessed gift of pardon and eternal salvation through the Savior.

In order for John the Baptist to effectively serve as the messenger who would prepare Jesus' way, he needed to be shown and fully convinced that Jesus was the promised Christ. He very likely heard reports from his parents, and Mary and Joseph of the angelic announcements of Jesus' divine person and heavenly mission. But this was all second hand information to him. That there be no question in John's mind that Jesus was the promised Lord and Savior, God told him to look for a special sign that He would give. John tells of that sign when He said of Jesus, "I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.... I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." (Jn. 1:32-34)

On the day of Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan, John received that divine proof concerning Jesus when he saw the Holy Spirit descending from the skies above like as in the form of a dove and landing on Jesus. And there was also the direct testimony of the heavenly Father, speaking with His majestic voice from heaven as He declared Jesus to be His beloved Son whom He had sent to be the Savior of the world.

As Christians, we know that these truths concerning Jesus are not cold and lifeless

historic facts that hold no special meaning for us. For without heavenly testimony that confirms Jesus' divine Sonship, we would neither know or believe in Jesus as God's chosen sacrificial Lamb who takes away our sins and we would be hopelessly and eternally lost. So, we never want to quickly pass by or overlook any testimony in Holy Scripture that would build up and fortify an unshakeable faith in us that Jesus is in truth our Lord and Savior.

Baptism, that is, the baptism of John the Baptist and the baptism with which we were baptized is one of those gracious means that the God the Holy Spirit uses to equip us with that faith which enables us to confidently believe in Jesus and through believing receive all that Jesus worked out for us as our Savior. In babies, baptism works the initial spark of saving faith, and in adults, who have already confessed Jesus as their Savior, baptism further confirms and strengthens their faith, for in it they receive God's unbreakable promise that those baptized who believe in Him will not perish eternally, but have everlasting life.

When Jesus approached John about Jesus being baptized, initially John resisted this idea, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" John recognized his own need for baptism, because he was a sinner. Whereas the notion of Jesus being baptized sounded out of line, because Jesus is the sinless Son of God.

Why would Jesus have any need to be baptized, if He had no sin to be washed away and being the Son God He was one with the Father and the Holy Spirit from eternity? Jesus gave this brief word of explanation and reason for baptizing Him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

No one should mistakenly take this to mean Jesus was saying by this that baptism is another commandment of God's law which Jesus was to obey for us. Contrary to what the Reformed Churches teach, baptism is not a law of God that He commands us to obey like the 10 commandments. Rather it is a wonderful means of grace in which God does truly great things for us. Just as was said earlier, through it God establishes His covenant of grace with us, as the Spirit uses it to works faith in the hearts of babies and confirms the faith in believing adults.

If Jesus was not fulfilling the righteousness of the law in being baptized, what then? He was simple saying that this was the right and proper thing for Him to do as our substitute. Since as our Savior Jesus was do all that God calls upon us to do, Jesus was also baptized even though He didn't personally need it.

In regard to all that Jesus did in life and in death as our Savior, it is comforting and reassuring for us to hear the heavenly Father declare concerning the life and work of Jesus, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." God the Father was announcing to all those who were present on this occasion, as well as to us that He was well pleased with all that Jesus had done thus as our substitute in living as our perfect Savior. Since Jesus' righteous life was to become our righteousness so that through Him we are seen as righteous and acceptable to God, any doubts of Jesus accomplishing this for us is removed when God the Father says of Him, I am well pleased with all that You have done for sinful mankind to be their righteousness. This same statement of God's

approval and acceptance of Jesus' substitutionary life for us was repeated on the Mount of Transfiguration shortly before Jesus went to the cross to finish His work as our Savior through His suffering and death for our sins.

Since the heavenly Father was well pleased with all that Jesus did as our Savior, as we put our faith and trust in His wonderful work for us, God transfers to us the righteousness of Christ. And now looking at us through Jesus, God the Father can say of us, you are my dear children in whom I am well pleased. This wonderful truth is far better for us to embrace and hold on to than the philosophy of the world that tries to explain away all our flaws and imperfections and says on that basis, we are just fine the way we are and we don't need any Savior to make things right for us with God. No, Jesus' righteous life lived for us is the only answer in making us right with God, that is, in making us righteous before God.

Another important truth demonstrated at Jesus' baptism, which we all know and never want to lose our hold on, is the manifestation of the one true God. He is clearly seen here as being made up of three distinct persons of the godhead. We behold God the Son standing in the water below and God the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus like as in the form of a dove and God the Father speaking from the heaven above. This scene eliminates the false notion that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are merely three names for the same God. Neither is this scene suggesting a belief of polytheism, that is, that it reveals them as three gods. For as testified elsewhere in Scripture the three persons are united together as one God, whom we refer to as the Triune God.

Living in a day and age where the religious community has relegated the God of the Bible as being one of many ways that God can be defined, understood, and believed in, how important it is for us to review over and over again those sections of Holy Scripture that reveal to us and confirm in us the belief in the one true Triune God. Looking back to what happened with the children of Israel in the Old Testament and seeing how they adopted the false beliefs of their neighbors in worshiping many other gods along with the Triune God, we are alerted to how the devil has worked and continues to work today so as to rob us of the belief in the only true God, who alone can save us eternally.

Rejoice in and make known to others the wonderful fact that the heavenly Father who created this world and sustains it by His almighty power has also given us life and breath, that Jesus, God's only begotten Son, purchased and won us from sin, death, and the devil through His perfect life and death, and that God the Holy Spirit has descended upon us through God's Word and Sacraments, giving us faith to enjoy God's pardon through Jesus Christ and the spirit of love to walk in God's commands, and the blessed hope of eternal life.

Many are the wonderful truths for our lives found in the special event of Jesus' baptism. May we cherish them and never lose our hold on them for Jesus' sake. Amen.