

The Joyful Exchange

Sermon Text: Mark 1:4-11

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.

⁴John came baptizing in the desert and preaching a Baptism repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And all the land of Judea and all of Jerusalem went out to him, and were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. ⁶And John was dressed in camel hair and a belt of leather was around his waist, and he ate locust and wild honey. ⁷And he preached, saying, “there is One coming after me Who is mightier than me, of Whom I am not fit to stoop down and loosen His sandal strap. ⁸I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit.”

⁹And in happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. ¹⁰And immediately, coming up from the water He saw the Heavens torn open and the Spirit coming down on Him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came out of Heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am pleased.”

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The Gospel of Mark begins with the account of John the Baptist. John came baptizing and preaching a Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This was not an unusual practice in the days of Jesus. During the Intertestamental period (between the Old and New Testaments) the Jews had introduced the custom of baptism, and the Jewish rabbis would often perform baptisms. The unusual thing with John's Baptism was who he baptized. The Rabbinical Baptism was only ever performed on proselytes, those Gentiles who wished to convert to Judaism. The Gentiles were not sons of Abraham and were thus not part of the God's covenant with His people. The Gentiles were outside of God's people, but through this Rabbinical Baptism they could be welcomed into the people of God.

John, however, did not baptize Gentiles but Jews. People from all over Judea came to be baptized by John. In doing this John was essentially welcoming people into the family of God.

Baptism is the Sacrament of Initiation, which marks a person's rebirth into the family of God. By baptizing these Jews, John was welcoming them into the family of God; which meant that he was also saying that these Jews were not actually part of God's family prior to their Baptism.

It is for this reason that the Pharisees hated John the Baptist, for he was saying that they were outside of God's family and were in need of this Baptism.

It is strange to think that the Jews were not part of God's people, for they were the sons of Abraham, their race is God's chosen race. But John did not consider these Jews members of God's people, and why was this?

The answer is seen in the type of Baptism that John gave. John came preaching repentance and offered a Baptism for the forgiveness of sins. The Pharisees thought they were saved because they were the sons of Abraham and because they performed all the ritual sacrifices.

However, we are not saved because of some special lineage or because of the mere performance of sacrifices. Instead we are saved through repentance of our sins and faith in our Lord Jesus. Later on in Mark's Gospel, when Jesus began His ministry, He went around preaching "repent and believe in the Gospel." (Mark 1:15) In Luke's Gospel John the Baptist rebukes the high priests for their lack of repentance, "do not say 'we have Abraham as our father' for God is able to raise up sons of Abraham from these stones. Instead bears fruits worthy of repentance." (cf. Luke 3:8) God does not desire our sacrifices and our performance of rituals. He desires the repentance of our sins. As the Psalmist said "God does not desire your burnt offerings, but a broken and contrite heart." (cf. Psalm 51:16-17)

The Jews thought they could be saved by making sacrifices in the temple, but a sacrifice without repentance is meaningless. Those Jews who did not repent and believe, were not part of God's family. Thus John brought to them a Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of their sins, so that they could repent and be baptized and be welcomed in the people of God.

The Rabbinical Baptism was a mere custom that symbolised the entry of a Gentile into the Jewish people. But John's Baptism was a true Sacrament that granted the people forgiveness of their sins and true entry into the people of God.

There are even people today, who think that they will go to heaven because they are a "Christian", but be warned my brothers and sisters, not all who cry "Lord, Lord," will be saved (Matt. 7:21), not all who call themselves "Christian" are in fact Christian. Some claim that because they were baptized and confirmed that they will go to heaven. But Baptism without repentance and faith is meaningless. When John came baptizing, he preached a message of repentance. Those who were baptized by John are said to have confessed their sins. And at the end of Mark's Gospel Jesus said, "he who is baptized and believes will be saved, but he who does not believe will not be saved." (Mark 16:16)

Baptism does truly grant us the forgiveness of our sins and join us into the

people of God, and for this reason we are told to go forth and baptize all people (Matt. 28:19). But without repentance and faith Baptism is ineffective.

But if John's Baptism was one of repentance which granted the forgiveness of sins, then why did Jesus need to be baptized by John? If Jesus is without sin, why was He baptized? In order to answer that question, we must ask another question, if Jesus is without sin, then why did He die on the Cross?

Jesus was baptized for the forgiveness of sins for the same reason that He was executed on the cross as the punishment for sins. He did this to take your place, so that you could take His. Jesus took on flesh and was baptized in order to share in your humanity, and to share in your Baptism. He died and shared in your death. He did this to unite Himself with you, so that by sharing in your death you could share in His resurrection. As St. Paul said "we who were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death. We through Baptism are buried with Him, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead, so too will we also be raised. For it we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection." (cf. Rom. 6:3-5)

Christ took on sinful human flesh, and even though He was without sin Himself, He bore in His body the sins of the world. Therefore, when He was baptized He was baptized as a sinner to receive the forgiveness of sins, and when He died He died as sinner to suffer the consequences of sin. And in doing this He united Himself with our humanity, so that we could be united with Him in His divinity. As St. Athanasius said, "God became man so that man might become God."

Jesus was clothed in humanity, and through Baptism we are clothed in Jesus. As St. Paul said, "for as many of you were baptized into Christ have been clothed in Christ." (Gal. 3:27)

In order to clothe you in Christ, Christ first clothed Himself with you. God made Him Who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus clothed Himself in your sin, so that you could be clothed in His righteousness, He was baptized and died as a sinner, in order to unite Himself with your Baptism and your death, so that you would be united with Him in life. Jesus took your place so that you could take His. This is what Martin Luther called the Joyful Exchange.

When Jesus was nailed to the cross He took your punishments, and in return you received His blessings. He died in your place, so that you could live in His. When Jesus was nailed to the cross He did so as if He was you. He died for your sins, to suffer your punishment. When He died He died as if He was [insert name]. And by uniting Himself to us, He has united us to Him. So that when you stand before the Throne of God, you do so as if you were the Son of God Himself. When [insert name] stands before God he doesn't stand there as [insert

name], but he stands there as if he was Jesus Christ.

This is the same with our Baptism. When Christ was baptized He did so in the place of sinners. He was baptized as if He were you. He went down into the waters of the Jordan River to be cleansed of your sins, to repent on your behalf. He united Himself to you in your Baptism and you are united to Him. So that when each of you are baptized you are clothed in Christ as if you were baptized as Christ Himself. And if we are baptized as Christ, then we share in those blessings that Christ received in His Baptism.

John said, "I baptize you with water, but Jesus will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

After being baptized Jesus came up out of the water and the Holy Spirit came down onto Him. And the Father spoke from Heaven and said "You are My Beloved Son, in whom I am pleased."

In our Baptism, we are clothed in Christ. We stand there as if we are Jesus. And so in our Baptism these blessings of God are given to us. The Holy Spirit comes down to rest on us, and the Father in heaven declares us to be His beloved son.

We are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, for in our Baptism we are united with the Triune God. God dwells in us and we dwell in Him. In verse 10 Jesus is said to have gone up while the Spirit of God is said to have come down. It is not a coincidence that Mark used these words in his Gospel. Throughout the Scriptures the authors frequently use different directions to make a significant point.

Through the Baptism of John the heavens are torn open, Heaven and earth are united. And Jesus comes up to see the heavens opened to Him. And while Jesus goes up the Holy Spirit comes down.

As we are united to Christ in Baptism, we in our own Baptism experience what Christ experienced. In our Baptism the heavens and the earth were united for us, so that we could be raised up to share in the heavenly experience. We are raised up to share in the divinity of Jesus. And as we ascend the Spirit of God descends to us. We are raised up to dwell with God in heaven, and God descends to dwell with us on earth.

This is the Joyful Exchange, this is the very purpose of Christ's birth. That Jesus Christ, God the Son, took on flesh and dwelt among us on earth, in order that man could take on Christ and dwell with God in heaven. God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwell in us here and now on earth, and we dwell in the Triune God now in heaven.

Through Baptism are we united with the Triune God. In Baptism Christ united Himself to us and us to Him. He clothed us in Himself, we are joined to God the

Son through the waters of Baptism. And through this Baptism heaven is opened to us, so that just as Christ has ascended into heaven and dwells at the right hand of God the Father, so too have we been raised with Christ. We are joined to God the Father, we dwell with Him in heaven now, this is not something that we need to wait for, for our souls are already in His hands. And in our Baptism the Holy Spirit comes down to dwell with us on earth. The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to come and to unite Himself with us. We are joined to God the Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacrament. Through Baptism we are united with the Holy Trinity.

And since in our Baptism we are joined to Christ's Baptism, we have received the Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Christ was baptized to fulfil all righteousness. Christ committed no sin, and yet He took your place and was baptized as a sinner to receive the cleansing of your sins, and He died on the cross as a sinner to pay the debt for your sins. And through Baptism you have been united to Christ, you have received the cleansing of your sins, you have received the full payment of your debts, and you have been declared righteous. Christ took your sin and punishment that you earned upon Himself, and in Baptism He placed on you the righteousness that He earned.

And in your Baptism you are declared the beloved son of God, you are welcomed in God's people, you belong to God's family. For the Son of God became a man so that man could become the sons of God. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Lord God, heavenly Father, we praise You that You have revealed Your will and wisdom in the life of Your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. We praise You that You have given us the gift of Your Holy Spirit in our baptism, and that in baptism You have acknowledged us as Your dear children. We praise You that in the baptism of Your Son in the Jordan You marked Him out as the Messiah, would be our true representative, to fulfil all righteousness, and, as our substitute, to give Himself in sacrifice for our sin and death. We praise You that, as Jesus saw the heavens opened when He was baptised, You have assured us of eternal life, where we shall see Your heaven opened to us.

Through Your Holy Spirit renew the mind of Christ in us, and let it grow in us. As Jesus began His public ministry for us at His baptism, we thank You for the privilege of regarding our baptism as our commissioning to serve You. Make us ready to give ourselves sacrificially for others, as Jesus has done, in ways that glorify You.

In mercy care for the spiritual welfare of all our baptised children. Give all parents the grace to show Your will and way to those who have yet to learn all that Christ has commanded us, by faithful worship, love for Your Word, and the desire to walk in the ways of Christ at all times. Free us all from being like this world. Transform us inwardly, that all our thoughts, words, and deeds may reflect Your perfect will.

Bless those who are one in confession with us in the fellowship of Your Church. Pour out Your blessing and strength on our pastors, and our vicar Jake Zabel, that they may preach and teach Your Word with warmth and energy, and let the light of Your Gospel shine to people in darkness. Bless the witness of us all to the power of Jesus Christ to save sinners. Fill us with increasing zeal for the salvation of people who do not yet know Him as their Saviour, and for the extension of His kingdom. Send Your Holy Spirit to all Your people, to overcome weakness in Your Church, to remove all indifference, to cast out all fear of human beings, to reject the love of the world, and to banish all lukewarmness.

Grant that we may find strength in Your almighty power and daily care. Show Your mercy and goodness to the sick, the lonely, the bereaved, and the suffering. Teach them to cast their cares on You. Show them that You are not dealing with them in wrath, but in love, for Jesus' sake.

Help, heal, uphold, and strengthen us all, and in all things enable us to rejoice in Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, whom we adore, with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.