

1st Sunday after Epiphany Baptism of our Lord 2019
Luke 3:15-22.

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

The text for the sermon is the Gospel heard before, Luke 3:15-22.

15 The people were expecting something and were all wondering in their hearts whether John might perhaps be the Christ. 16 John answered them all: "I am baptising you with water. However, the One who is more powerful than I am is coming. I am not worthy to untie His sandal-strap. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 17 He has His winnowing fork in His hand to clean up His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but He will burn the chaff with fire that cannot be put out." 18 So with many other words John kept exhorting the people and telling them the Good News.

19 However, when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, 20 Herod added this to them all: he locked John up in prison. 21 When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was also baptised. While He was praying, heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit came down on Him in bodily form like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, which said, "You are My Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with You."

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,
Peace be with you.

After the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus' baptism is the next most important event in Jesus' ministry. - In a magnificent epiphany, the Father and the Holy Spirit open up the heavens in order to proclaim Jesus to those who are present at this important event. - The Holy Spirit descended **in bodily form like a dove** to anoint Jesus as the Christ. The Father acknowledged and proclaimed Jesus as **His beloved Son**. This is a major event in the perfect life that Jesus led that makes it possible for human beings to become part of God's family as the adopted children of God.

Jesus began His ministry in the womb of the Virgin Mary. There, He took on our humanity and, even though He never sinned, He began to experience the pain and the curse of sin at that time. He endured the pain of childbirth just as we all do. - He grew up in a world where work was just as frustrating as it is today. He endured the pain, the hardship, the frustration of sin just as we all do. Even though He never sinned, He carried the sin of the world for us from the very beginning of His existence as a human being.

Up until the events in today's Gospel, Jesus more or less carried out His ministry in a quiet, private way. A little more than thirty years since He took up our humanity. - Nevertheless, we only know about a few events and people in His life: Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, Anna and Simeon, the magi, and the teachers of the law who were astonished by His learning when He came to the temple at the age of twelve. - That's about all that the Bible tells us about the first thirty years of His life as a human being. - It's really not very much when you consider who this is and what He has done for all humanity.

This all changed at the Baptism. - Jesus' ministry went from private to public in a big way. This was the beginning of a public ministry that would bring eternal comfort to some, and incredible frustration to others. He brought hope to the hopeless and challenged those who were confident in themselves. - Those, who loved Him, loved Him more than life itself, and those, who rejected Him, hated Him to the point of plotting against His life. Jesus' public ministry was very divisive. It divided the believers from the unbelievers. It separated the saved from the damned.

The Father said, **"You are My Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with You."** - These words remind me of the words that God spoke to Satan with regard to Job. **"The LORD asked Satan: "Have you considered My servant Job? Indeed, there is no one like him on the earth. He is a blameless and upright man, who fears God and keeps away from evil."** [Job 1:8.] - These words were a challenge to Satan. They were a proclamation of Job's standing before God ... a proclamation of Job's faithfulness ... a proclamation that intensely frustrated Satan.

In a similar way, the Father's proclamation at Jesus' Baptism not only re-affirmed Jesus' identity as the Son of God, but it also proclaimed that here was the seed who would crush the serpent's head. - The Father's proclamation at the Baptism was not only an epiphany of the true nature of Jesus, but it was also a battle cry

that this is the champion of all mankind ... the champion who will save all mankind from sin, death, and the power of the devil. - The Father's proclamation at the Baptism was not just an identification, but it was also a challenge ... fighting words aimed at the devil.

The devil has been challenging these words of the Father ever since. As we read through the Gospels, we see that the challenge, the temptations that the opposition brought against Jesus all had a common theme. They all attacked the idea that Jesus really is the only begotten Son of God.

In a few Sundays when the season of Lent starts, we'll read the temptations that the devil brought against Jesus. Two of the temptations begin with the words, "**If you are the Son of God ...**" (Matt. 4; Luke 4). The other temptation asks Jesus to worship the devil as God. - All three temptations attack the identity of Jesus as God ... the identity that the Father proclaimed at Jesus' baptism.

Then there's that temptation at the cross. As Jesus hung on the cross "**those who were passing by kept ridiculing Him, shaking their heads, 40 and saying, "You, who are going to tear down the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross!"**" [Matthew 27:39-40, Luke 23:45.] Even as Jesus hung on the cross, the passersby were still challenging the words that the Father proclaimed in this morning's Gospel.

The attack on the Father's words was one of the major themes of the opposition against Jesus from the time of His baptism to His crucifixion. - The Holy Spirit inspired St John to write, "**Therefore the Jews were trying even more to kill Him, because He was not only breaking the Sabbath, but was also calling God His own Father, making Himself equal to God.**" [John 5:18.] - Jesus' enemies simply rejected the words of God the Father that are recorded in today's Gospel.

Even today, there are people who admire Jesus as a great teacher, a good example to follow ... maybe even a miracle worker. Nevertheless, they draw the line at the words of the Nicene Creed: ***God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.*** They simply refuse to believe that Jesus Christ is God. - They reject the proclamation that God the Father made at the Baptism of Jesus.

Why do people reject the proclamation of God the Father? - They reject the Father's words because those words would mean that Jesus has authority. If Jesus really is God the Son, then He has authority over all things and all people. His Words are the Word of God. He is the Judge and the Saviour of all.

As judge, He tells us that our sin is something that happens in our will, not in our behaviour. Our very thoughts can be, and often are, sinful. - The things that we do that seem good to the world around us, can still be sinful if our heart is not in the right place. - We help our neighbour not because we love our neighbour, but because people will notice how good we are. - The truth is, if we ourselves notice that we are doing a good thing and pat ourselves on the back, we convert a good deed into sin. - When Jesus judges us, He shows us that we are a lot more sinful than we think we are.

As Judge, Jesus also knows that our sins deserve punishment both here on earth and forever in hell. He knows that we cannot stand before God on the Last Day if we are still in our sins. He knows that we would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation. Our sinful will is rightly terrified and most certainly does not like this teaching of Jesus the judge.

As Saviour, Jesus tells us that He is our only Saviour. All other saviours are false. Jesus said ... "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**" [John 14:6.] - As rebels, we want choices. We want ways that are more to our way of thinking. We want to be God and be in charge of our own salvation.

Nevertheless, it's Jesus as our only Saviour that has the most comfort for us. For not only does Jesus proclaim our guilt and punishment, but then He takes that guilt and punishment onto Himself. - Instead of pouring the wrath of God out onto us as we deserve, He takes the wrath of God onto Himself. - As the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write, **God made Him who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.** [2Corinthians 5:21.] - Jesus took our sin to the cross and there He endured the eternal punishment that we deserved. He endured that punishment so that we don't have to.

In fact, it's in the very act of baptism that Jesus joins Himself to us. As the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write in today's Epistle, "**Do you not know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might begin to live a new life.**" [Romans 6:3,4.] Here the Holy Spirit works through Paul to teach us that Holy Baptism delivers Jesus' work on the cross to us.

Paul also teaches us that Holy Baptism delivers resurrection into eternal life. For after Jesus our Judge and Saviour died for us on the cross, He broke the bonds of death and rose to new life. - Holy Baptism not

only credits Jesus' death to our account, but the resurrection from the dead also belongs to us. Jesus, by His suffering and death, not only paid the full penalty for our sin, but He also earned eternal life for us.

In fact, today's Gospel tells us that heaven was opened at Jesus' Baptism. - In proclaiming Jesus as His son, God the Father already proclaims the victory that Jesus will win on the cross - the victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. - He is already proclaiming eternal life through His beloved Son. He is already proclaiming the victory that will win eternal life for us. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Prayer of the Church Baptism of our Lord

P Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence to offer our Father prayers for all people as they have need and for ourselves.

Brief Silence.

P We give You thanks that our Lord Jesus entered the waters of the Jordan and have taken our place under the law and fulfill all righteousness for us. Renew within us the promise of our baptism that we may daily die to sin and arise to live holy and righteous lives of faith and good works. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We give You thanks for our nation, that all those entrusted with leadership be given grace to serve with wisdom, courage and integrity, Strengthen and uphold them in honour. For all who serve in our armed forces those who care for the sick and injured, especially doctors, nurses, technicians, and all medical workers, the police the SES and fire brigades, that they carry out their calling with joy and dedication as they seek to preserve life and care for all, protect them from evil and guide them in paths that are pleasing to You. Lord in Your mercy.

C hear our prayer.

P We give You thanks that You have called and gathered Your baptized people into Your Church. - Prosper the good work of preaching the Gospel and administering the life-giving Sacraments in our worship. Instil in the men of our congregations a love and a receptive heart for Your name, so that from their number You might raise up some to serve as Pastors to Your flock. Grant all our congregations to increase and abound in love for one another and for all so that the schemes of the devil may come to nothing. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We give You thanks for standing with us in times of weakness, illness, despair and death. Heavenly Father, grant Your care, comfort and healing those who are sick or suffering [*including*]. Fill each of them with a confident trust in Your mercy, and teach us all to look expectantly to the day when You will grant us permanent healing. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We give You thanks for the gift of family, for all pregnant women and mothers, that they may joyfully acknowledge Your gift of spouse, children and home. Bless the elderly, the widowed and the orphaned, and show forth Your grace to them that they may not feel alone. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We give You thanks for the privilege of being Your children by baptism and faith, and for calling us to Your Table of grace. Help us to receive with faith and for our good all the blessings of this communion of the body and blood of our Lord. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We give You thanks for all the material things You have entrusted to our care. Help us to receive them with gratitude and use them faithfully and for Your glory. Guide us to know and care for those in need, both near and far. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We give You thanks, O Lord, that You both hear and answer the prayers of Your people. Grant us grace to trust in You for all things. Keep from us all things harmful and give to us only those things beneficial to us and to our faith; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**