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The Baptism of our Lord (transferred)

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Vienna, VA

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“I am Baptized!”

Text: Luke 3:15-22; Romans 6:1-11

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

If you were to take a survey of Christians and ask: *When was Heaven opened to you?* many (or most!) would point to the death and resurrection of Jesus. And you would not be wrong. His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave provided the atonement and forgiveness of all of our sin. The rift between us and God caused by our sin has been overcome by God in Jesus, and so in Him, Heaven is again opened to us.

And yet today in the Holy Gospel we heard an amazing thing: *when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened.* And they were opened not to let the Holy Spirit out to descend in the form of a dove; and not so that the Father's voice could be heard. They were opened because already in Jesus' baptism, His death and resurrection have begun. In the waters of the Jordan He is already taking His place with us sinners. He is already taking the sin of us sinners. The water of His baptism means that the wood of His cross is not far away. And so just as the curtain in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom when Jesus died on the cross, *opening* our access to God and the Holy of Holies through the blood of Jesus - so too, already here in Jesus' baptism, heaven is torn open. His work of salvation - of saving us! - has begun.

And so the Father is well pleased. Here we see God's heart and His great love towards us. He is pleased when His beloved and holy Son jumps into the sinful cesspool of the Jordan. Not to wash His own sin away, for He had no sin; but to take our sin (and so our death) upon Himself. We are not happy when our children only so much as jump in mud puddles and dirty just their clothes! But our Heavenly Father is here well pleased, for the death of His Son means the life of the world.

And for this God has been working through all of history.

Yet not only is the Father well pleased, the Spirit of God also descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove. The same bird that signaled to Noah that the death and destruction of the flood were over, now indicates to us that the death and destruction of our sin is over – in this One; this man now anointed by the Spirit, and so given the title the Christ, which means *the anointed one*. He is the one chosen from before the foundation of the world to do this very thing, to work this very work – to save us from our sin.

And so when Jesus is baptized, *Heaven opens*. For Jesus' work and ministry for us is not a series of unconnected events, which unfortunately (but perhaps unavoidably) ended at the cross. (Although I think we tend to think of it that way sometimes.) No, from start to finish, His work for us is a seamless whole. From start to finish a *singular work* – that we whom He created, but who fell into sin and death, He might re-create through the forgiveness of our sin and a resurrection to a new life. For that is why He was born, that is why *all* He did, and that is why He is baptized.

And that is why you are baptized. For if Jesus' work and ministry for you is a seamless whole, a singular work – *it is a work not yet finished*. He is not content to open Heaven *in general* – He wants to open Heaven **for you**. And so as His public ministry begins with His baptism, so it ends with His command to His Church to “*baptize all nations in His Name.*” (Mt 28:19) Which means to do it for Him, in His place and in His stead. For if I give you the authority to do something *in my name*, when you do it, it is as if I had done it. And so now with baptism in Jesus' name; in the Name of the Triune God. When this is done, it is as if God Himself has done it. And so you can be sure: whatever is here promised, whatever God has claimed of these waters, is yours. For this is not man's doing, or the Church's doing, but God's doing. The work and ministry of Jesus, continuing for you.

And so what exactly is happening here? St. Paul told us in the reading we heard earlier from Romans. In short, it is the same thing that happened at Jesus' baptism – *His death and resurrection*. For Paul says: “*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death*

like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

And so just as the baptism of Jesus was a defining moment in His life and work – the start of His public ministry – so it is with us. A defining moment. The start of a new life. You are now not what you were before. You are a new creation. The wages of sin is death, but those wages have been paid in your baptism. For you really and truly (although we must say *mysteriously*) died in those waters. With Christ. God joined you with Him in His death on the cross. And so the old man of sin in you was crucified with Christ. In baptism, you get death over with. Now. And so you never have to worry about death, whenever and however it may come to you, because God has taken care of that for you – you died already.

But not only that! Because just as Jesus did not remain dead and in the grave, neither do you! For (as Paul told us) if you are joined to Him in His death, you are also joined to Him in His resurrection. And so raised in baptism to a new life. A new life set free from sin and death. A new life of faith. A new life as a child of God. A child anointed by the Holy Spirit . . . with whom your Heavenly Father is well pleased . . . and to whom Heaven is open!

And all of that is not just future-talk – but makes a difference in your life *now*. For just as Jesus’ work **for you** continues still, so does His work **in you**. Giving you His Holy Spirit and giving you Himself as He gives you His body and blood, His Holy Gospel, and His Holy Absolution to strengthen the faith given you in baptism, and to *forgive us our trespasses*, for when we go jumping in the mud puddles of sin. . . . And then also His work continues **through you**, as you live as His child, *forgiving those who trespass against you*, and living us the royal priest you are – bringing others before God in prayer, bringing God and His Word to those around you, and doing good to all.

And so for the Christian, baptism is never an I WAS, but always an I AM. It is not a past event, a baby thing, but an ongoing and continuing reality. That when the devil attacks us we fear him not but boldly proclaim: *I am baptized!* Devil, you have been defeated. And that when sin overcomes us and assails our conscience, we boldly retort: *I am baptized!* My sin is forgiven. And that when death or distress come upon us, and the devil tries to make us think we are unworthy of God and destined for nothing but hell, we boldly insist: *I am baptized!* And Heaven is open to me. For the

One whose sandals even the great John was not worthy to untie, has come to me, so unworthy, and has made me worthy.

Yes, *I am baptized!* And Heaven is open to me. How great is that? For my Lord's work for me and in me and through me is not just a series of unconnected and unrelated events, but from first to last a seamless whole, a singular work, to make me His own. And He does. And He has. *I am baptized!* I am a child of God.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.