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The Baptism of our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
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“The New Creation”

Text: Genesis 1:1-5; Mark 1:4-11; Romans 6:1-11

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

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, ***the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.*** When God began creating, the first thing we are told is this. There is a certain chaos. Primal, swirling, deep waters. There is no form yet, no shape, no light. ***The Spirit of God is hovering over the waters,*** but they are void, empty. There is no life yet. Everything is disordered.

But when the Word of God is spoken to the disorder, there is order. The chaos is formed and shaped at God’s Word into His good and orderly creation. Spirit, water, and Word combine to bring forth life. God says ***“Let there be,”*** and there is. And so first God orders the light and the darkness, as we heard. But then there follows the sea and the sky, the sea and the dry land, the plants and trees, the day and night and heavenly bodies, the swarms of creatures that live in sky and sea, the beasts that live on the earth, and finally man. And it is good. All very good.

But soon we hear another word. A word that does not create, but brings chaos and disorder again. A word that does not water but dries up. A word that brings darkness, not light. A word of doubt and unbelief, as satan says to Eve, *“Did God really say?”* Is God’s Word really good? Is this order good? And when Eve bites - both literally and figuratively! - there is chaos and disorder again. The chaos and disorder of sin and death.

And so it is. The water doesn’t stay in its place anymore, does it? There are floods and tsunamis. The land isn’t so solid anymore, is it? There are earthquakes and volcanoes. The sky produces violent winds. And then there is man and the disorder and chaos we cause, with our lies, murders, thefts, adulteries, deceits, betrayal, slander, envy, greed, rebellion, anger, hatred, idolatries, and blasphemies. All these things that make your life less than what God intended it to be. These chaotic things that come crashing down *upon* you, and erupting up *from* you. These things that disorder your life, your home, your marriage, your friendships, your soul. And it is not good. Not good at all.

Why didn't God just wipe it all out and start over? Why didn't He just "nip it in the bud" instead of letting it grow to what we see in the world today? **Because He loves you.** Because He loved Adam and Eve. To wipe out the world and start over would mean to wipe out His children, made in His image, who were now disordered by sin. This He would not do. No, God would wipe out the chaos and disorder and death of sin another way . . .

Fast forward now to the Holy Gospel, to St. Mark. It is interesting how Mark begins his Gospel. He makes no mention of Jesus' conception or birth. No angels, shepherds, or wise men. No Bethlehem and no Jesus in the Temple as a youth. He lets Matthew and Luke fill in all those details. Mark does it differently.

He starts with John the Baptist in the chaos of the wilderness and his **baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**. And then Jesus comes to be baptized. And when the Word of God made flesh enters the water, and the Spirit of God comes down you have exactly the scene as it was in the beginning of creation - water and Word and Spirit all together. And this, Mark says with the first words he writes - chapter one, verse one - this is *the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*. The beginning of the Good News that in Jesus Christ, the Son of God has come in the flesh to begin a NEW creation. He has come and begun to wipe out the chaos and disorder and death of sin. And so the Father is well pleased. This is good.

So what is Jesus doing here? How is He beginning the new creation? He is taking the place of sinners. For it was sinners coming out to be baptized by John. The people were coming from all over, confessing their sins, and being baptized. But when Jesus comes, He does not confess, for He has nothing to confess. But He is baptized. He is immersed in the putrid water of our sin. Like a sponge, He takes it all into Himself, all our sin, to be the sinner for us; to be sin for us (5 Corinthians 5:21). And so Jesus is baptized into His death. For that is what it means for Him to take our sin and its chaos and disorder into Himself - that He will be wiped out in our place. He will be sacrificed for the sin of the world; for your sin and mine.

And that you may understand that, Mark connects Jesus' baptism with His death on the cross when he says that at Jesus' baptism, **the heavens were torn open**. They were schismed; *schizoed*, in Greek. Mark is the only Gospel writer to use that word with Jesus' baptism, and then Mark uses it again in *only one other place* in his Gospel - at the end, when Jesus died on the cross. Then Mark tells us that the curtain in the Temple, which isolated the most holy place, the place of God, from the rest of the Temple, was *schizoed*; torn in two from top to bottom (Mark 15:38). And with that Mark wants you to know: because of these events - the baptism of Jesus, His perfect life, and His death on the cross - the division between God and man is over. The disorder and chaos caused by sin is over. Jesus' death on the cross means the wiping out of sin and new life for the world. A new creation. And it starts with

Jesus' baptism.

And with your baptism. Baptism is the beginning of the new creation personally applied to you. That's what the apostle Paul is teaching us today in Romans. Just as Jesus joined Himself to us and our sin in His baptism, so now you are joined to Jesus and His righteousness in your baptism. For in baptism, Paul says, you are joined to Jesus in His death and resurrection so that not you, but the chaos, disorder, and death of sin be wiped out *in you*, and you live a new life. Through baptism, you are a new creation in Christ Jesus. Baptism is the beginning of the Gospel **for you**.

This is the greater baptism of which John spoke. The baptism where water, Word, and Spirit create new life, where sins are wiped out, heaven is opened, and children of men are made children of God, to whom the Father now says: *You are my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased.*

And you are! For as in the beginning, when water and Spirit and the Word of God come together, great things happen. Life happens. Creation happens. Still today.

Because of this, Luther would constantly say: *remember who you are!* You are no longer that chaotic, disordered mess, dying in sin - you are a new creation. Dying and rising with Christ has set you free from your slavery to sin and death to live a new life. A Christ life, a child of God life. ***Don't you know this?*** St. Paul asked. . . . Well, maybe we forget it sometimes, and we don't live like it sometimes. We get caught up in the chaos and disorder, and the sinful flesh that we still live in goes right along.

But at such times, do not despair, but remember that you are baptized. Not that you were baptized - but that you are baptized. This is who you are. You are who God says you are. And so each day, because your sinful flesh does sinful things, return to your baptism. Not to be baptized again - once is enough. But to return to its blessings, to its grace, to the promises of Christ made to you there. To not embrace your sin, but repent and die to your sin. To drown that old sinful man in you again, and rise in the forgiveness of Christ to a new life. That each day, by grace through faith, you be raised again - ***dead to sin, and alive in Christ Jesus.***

And alive in Christ Jesus, alive with His Spirit, you now sponge up the sins of those who sin against you with your forgiveness and love. Do not repay evil with evil, anger with anger, or sin with sin of any sort. No, you have been set free from sin and all of that. To repay like that would be like going back to living in the chaos and disorder of the wilderness and eating locusts and wild honey! No, you've been given much better. Christ and His Spirit of holiness live in you. Your food and drink is now the Body and Blood of Jesus, given and shed for you for the remission of

your sins. You are sojourning here to your home in heaven. A new creation in the old, but no longer of the old. A child of your heavenly Father.

A child still learning, to be sure; still growing; messing up and being forgiven, secure in the life and love of your heavenly Father. And that's how He wants it. Not purposely ***sinning so that grace may abound***, but knowing that grace *does* abound for you. His grace, which is greater than your sin. His grace, which makes you new.

That as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever. *And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good* (Genesis 1:31). Again.

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.