

10 January 2021  
The Baptism of our Lord

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Nothing Changed, but Everything Changed”  
Text: Mark 1:4-11; Genesis 1:1-5; Romans 6:1-11

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

**T**here is a deadly disease afoot. It is highly contagious. People with it are quarantined, separated. There is misery. And people are dying from it.

There is political unrest. Uprisings. Violence. People wanting change, wanting to throw off the oppression. The military keeping the peace.

The rich are getting richer, and the poor, well, seem to stay poor. The gap between rich and poor seems to be getting wider, and the difference between these two groups is striking. Hard to believe they both live in the same world.

There is racial prejudice. Hatred. Division.

There is confusion. Lots of different teachings floating around. Lots of different gods. Some say this, some say that. Who to believe?

And always uncertainty about the future. Will things change? And what will happen to me when they do? Will I get swept up and swept away? Will life as I know it continue? What if . . .

**That is the situation when Jesus steps into the Jordan.**

And when He came up out of the water, there was still a deadly disease afoot, and people still dying of leprosy.

There was still the unwelcomed rule of Caesar and Rome, and its taxation and occupation and military.

There was still injustice and unfairness; prejudice and hatred between Jews and Gentiles and Samaritans; division and financial inequality.

There were still lots of gods and different teachings floating around.

And there was still uncertainty about the future.

So it seemed that when Jesus stepped into and then out of the Jordan that day, not much changed. It didn't really make much difference. Oh, it was cool! The *heavens opening*, a *dove descending on Him* - don't see that every day! - and then *a voice from heaven*, "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.*"

But for Joe the plumber, Simeon the shepherd, Miriam the mother, when the heavens closed back up, the dove flew away, and the voice stopped echoing, it was back to the same ol', same ol'.

**And yet at that moment, everything changed.**

For now there would be, could be, life after leprosy. Life after Covid.

Now there is a kingdom open to you, for you to be a citizen, that will not rise and fall like earthly ones, but last forever. One not oppressive or subject to the whims and sins of people or politicians.

Now there are riches beyond anything in this world.

Now all races, nationalities, languages, and cultures will become one in Him; one holy, Christian Church.

Now certainty, clarity, and confidence. *For now an epiphany.* Of a God come for us, not to demand from us, but to serve us, to help us, to save us. So that we will not be swept up and swept away by sin and death, but that those would be swept up by Him and destroyed. So that we could be swept up by Him and saved.

**All because Jesus stepped into the Jordan that day.**

The holy and sinless Son of God standing with sinners and taking our place. The Son of God who didn't need to be baptized, but *wanted* to be. For you. To be your substitute. To take your place in sin and death, that you have His place in His kingdom, and have forgiveness and life.

For here, standing in the water that once marked the border of the Promised Land, is God Himself, in human flesh. Come to give us a new Promised Land. Come to restore a fallen creation.

For creation was not always like this, of course. Not always like the situation in Jesus' day, not always like it is today. *In the beginning*, when *God created the heavens and the earth*, it was *good*. Everything was good, and its working together *very good*. There was

no sin, no death, no division, no poverty, no confusion, no fear, no pain, no hatred or prejudice or oppression. Only joy and perfection.

Until we decided we could “improve” it. Adam and Eve doing what God told them not to do. Not doing what God told them *to* do. And eating what God told them not to eat. But things didn’t get better. They got worse. A whole lot worse. A world of pain and death.

**But then Jesus stepped into the Jordan that day.** *To do*, as we just sang, *His Father’s pleasure* (LSB #407 v.1). To do everything we didn’t do, couldn’t do, wouldn’t do. Perfect obedience. From A to Z, from beginning to end. Nothing omitted. And then to lay down that perfect life for us. To be our substitute both in life and in death. To restore creation. Fix what sin had broken. And to redeem us. Set free all of us taken captive by sin and death.

That began when Jesus stepped *into* the Jordan that day, and it was finished when He stepped *out* of the tomb on the third day. So in Him, now, a *new* creation. New life. New hope.

**New life and hope that become yours when you are baptized.**

But *how can water do such great things?* Luther asked in his catechism. Well, it can’t. Not just water. Not even Jordan water. But when the Word of God is in the water, *then things change.*

Paul put it this way, as we heard today. That when the Word became flesh and was baptized, **He joined Himself to us** in our sin and death. He takes our sin, dies with us, and is buried with us. To defeat it all. To overcome it. And He did. So that now when we are baptized, that baptism **joins us to Him**. Paul says we die with Him, we rise with Him, we have new life with Him.

**And so everything changes.**

Yes, there’s still Covid. There’s still political division and unrest. There’s still prejudice and hatred. There’s still inequality and unfairness. There’s still sin and death. And it doesn’t seem to be getting better, but worse.

*And yet . . .* even in the midst of all this, you have hope. And confidence. And certainty. For all these things and this old world are passing away. They will not last. But you have what does - the Word and promises of God, and you are citizens of the kingdom of God. So sin and death no longer have dominion over you.

**That’s worth repeating: sin and death no longer have dominion over you!** Because in baptism you are joined to the One who overcame them and defeated them. Yes, they will

still effect you. You will sin, but your sin does not rule you. You will die, but your death will not hold you. You will rise and live.

And that's not just what will happen to you on the Last Day, *but even now*, according to Paul. **That's baptism's power.** That the reality of the Last Day is brought back in time to you here and now. Dying to sin now - repenting, and rising to a new life now - in forgiveness.

So you're not the same. This world is the same before and after your baptism, but you're not. You're in Christ Jesus. You have His victory.

So are you going to live the same old way as before, in the same old sins, or maybe even trying some new ones, as if, in baptism, nothing changed? ***By no means!*** Paul said. That's not who you are anymore. You're a new creation.

But maybe you don't feel like a new creation. For there's too much old in your life. Too much sin still clinging to you. You know that - *good!* John didn't think He was worthy either, to stand in the Jordan with Jesus and baptize Him. But what you think doesn't matter. What God says is what matters. And what God said at Jesus' baptism is what He now says in your baptism - *and* everytime you remember your baptism and repent of your sins and receive His forgiveness: ***You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.***

And you really are. And He really is. It is true. Not because of what you have done, but because of what Jesus has done for you, and given to you.

***You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.***

Let those words sink in a bit. Others may not be well-pleased with you, and you may not be with them, in this world of sin. There are still a lot of problems in this world, and they don't seem to be going away any time soon.

But your baptism transcends all that. Like Jesus, you are in this world but citizens of another. You are children of men but really children of God. You are dying, but really going from life to life. God calls a thing what it is, and so should we. In the beginning, it was day and night. At the Jordan, it was Jesus as His beloved Son. And here, in these waters, it is you as His beloved child. And so you are.

And until that day, the God who calls a thing what it is calls this bread and wine the Body and Blood of His Son - and so it is. And it is **for you**. For the forgiveness you need and the life you need. That in this world of disease, political unrest, division, inequality, prejudice, confusion, fear, and death, you have what is most sure and true, and all that you need. For Jesus is here. The Son of God who stepped into the flesh, who stepped into the Jordan, who stepped up to the cross, who stepped forth from the grave, now steps

down to you here in this water, in these words, and in this bread and wine.

And when he does, *nothing is the same*. **Everything changes. That's our epiphany today.** That in this world where it seems like nothing ever changes, everything has changed. Because Jesus is in the water, and in the water, you are in Him.

So you now have what the world needs. Just as Jesus stepped into this world for you, so you now step into the world for others. With the truth of God's Word. With the love that overcomes hatred and prejudice. With the life that overcomes death. With clarity in the midst of confusion. With confidence in a world of fear. With forgiveness for those in the snares of sin. For you are baptized. ***You are [God's] beloved Son; with you [He is] well pleased.*** Your future is secure. Everything has changed for you.

Remember that. Every day. Every time you hear bad news. Every time sin rears its ugly head. Every time you wonder *what will come next?* You may not know what is coming next, but you know WHO is coming, that you have His Spirit, and that heaven is open to you.

So don't leave that all here! Like nothing has changed for you. ***By no means!*** Take that life, that confidence, with you as you step out of this place. And live as the baptized child of God **you are**.

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.