

15 January 2017
The Baptism of Our Lord (observed)

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
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Jesu Juva

“John’s Destiny, Jesus’ Destiny, and Yours”
Text: Matthew 3:13-17; Romans 6:1-11; Isaiah 42:1-9

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

If you are surprised that Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized by John - good! You should be. So was John.

Wave after wave of people were coming to John, like the waves that lap the seashore. Coming to confess their sins. Coming to be baptized to wash those sins away and cleanse their guilty consciences and souls.

Until . . . one comes in silence. Confessing nothing. No sins. Not a one. Yet still desiring to be baptized. So either this one is deluded, thinking He has no sins to confess (like some people today), or He really is sinless, perfect. God in human flesh.

John knows the truth is the latter of those two options. Jesus is no madman. But if that’s true, then this isn’t right. John should not be baptizing Him - He should baptize John! And he says so. He tells Jesus that - not to *inform* Jesus (who as God in human flesh would certainly know that!), but to *confess* Jesus.

But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Or in other words: No, John, this is right. This is how it should be. This is how it *must* be. To fulfill all righteousness. *Everyone’s* righteousness. All these people’s righteousness. Your righteousness and mine.

For yes, Jesus was righteous and sinless. He didn’t need baptism. John is quite right. But He didn’t come just to be righteous and sinless, but to make us righteous and sinless. And this is part of how He is going to do just that. So do it, John.

This is John’s destiny. This is Jesus’ destiny. And this changes your destiny.

That’s a word that gets thrown around a lot in our world today, *destiny*. A lot of people try to think about what their destiny is, what they were destined to do or be. And especially this week, I think you’ll hear a lot of that kind of talk with the inauguration of a new president. What’s his destiny? What’s America’s destiny? And maybe you wonder what your destiny is, too . . .

But this, Jesus' baptism, is **John's destiny**. This is what John came for. All the other baptisms he did would ultimately be meaningless without this one. In fact, if he were to do only one baptism, this is the one he came to do. And after this, he begins to fade away. Jesus increases and John decreases (John 3:30). This is John's "it is finished" moment. His destiny fulfilled.

But Jesus' just beginning. Jesus' coming to John with all the other sinners is a snapshot of why He came, and of what He came to do: **to stand in our place**. Though no sinner He is baptized as a sinner. Not to take away His sin, but so that He take away ours. He enters our baptism that we might enter His. He enters into our death that we might enter into His life. He takes our place that we might have His.

This is **Jesus' destiny**. This is why He was sent. Which we see with the actions of the other two persons of the Godhead - the Holy Spirit descending upon Him in the form of a dove, and the voice of the Father descending from heaven, saying: *Atta boy! Well done!*

And we see it, too, the other notable time Jesus was silent and confessed no sin - when He stood on trial before Pontius Pilate. Pilate asks Him repeatedly: *What have you done?* And Jesus responds with silence (Matthew 27:14). There is nothing to say. Nothing to confess. He has done no wrong, but He also will not defend Himself. He has come to be the sinner. He has come to die our death. And so He will. And so Pilate finishes what John started. John baptizes Jesus into the death that Pilate will sentence Him to. To fulfill all righteousness. Everyone's righteousness. Our righteousness.

And with that, **our destiny is changed**. Before, our destiny was death. An earthly death and an eternal dying. For the wages of sin is death.

But if Jesus pays those wages for you (which He did with His death), *then your destiny has changed*. No longer is your destiny an earthly death with an eternal dying, but an earthly death that will be followed by eternal life, eternal *living*. For as Jesus entered into your death, into your curse, into your punishment, beginning with His baptism and ending with His cross, He did so that you might enter into His life, His blessing, His kingdom, beginning with your baptism and completed with your resurrection.

That's what Paul was talking about in the Epistle we heard today from Romans, this exchange. This Jesus taking our place and we getting His. That because of baptism, when we die we do not die alone, we die with Him who died for us, so that we will also rise with Him. And your baptism is the beginning of that - the beginning of that death and the beginning of that life. In baptism you die with Christ, and in baptism you rise with Him. Already here and now. You die with Christ and so are set free from the dominion and curse of sin, and you rise with Him to live with Him. To live a new life. The life you need the life you now have.

Perhaps it's hard to think of baptism that way because most of us do not remember our

baptism, when we were baptized. And when we see baptisms here, they do not look like much.

Folks in the early church thought that too. And so one of the early church fathers, named Ambrose, said of baptism: “You saw what is seen, but not what is done.” You saw what is seen, but not what is done. Or in other words, there’s more going on here than meets the eye. Or as Luther wrote in his baptism hymn that we just sung: *All that the mortal eye beholds is water as we pour it* (LSB #407 v.7).

But what you see is not all that is done. And it is Jesus’ baptism that gives us a glimpse of that; of what *really* happens whenever someone is now baptized with the baptism that Jesus has filled with Himself. The Spirit is there and descends upon the baptized. The Father is there and well pleased and calls out His “*Atta boy!*” And most important: **heaven is open**. The heaven locked to sinners is now open because the righteousness of Jesus is ours in the forgiveness of our sins.

And so, Paul says, you now have a new life to live. Like a criminal on death row who has been pardoned and set free, so has your baptism done for you.

And so, Paul says, do you now want to use your new found freedom to go back to the criminal life and wind up back on death row again? *That’s stupid!* But you can if you want.

But that’s not your destiny. That’s not who you now are. That’s not what your heavenly Father wants for you, why Jesus died for you, and why the Holy Spirit lives in you. That old life is dead to you now. You now live in Christ and His life, in His forgiveness and love, and in the promise and confidence that when you die, *whenever* you die, you will be with Him in Paradise (Luke 23:43).

So live like it! Paul says. When you sin, repent. And come and be absolved and receive the Body and Blood of your Lord. And also humble yourself and ask others to forgive you. And when others sin against you, forgive them. Be generous, do good, pray - and look for opportunities to do so. Remember - you’re not on death row anymore! You’re out! You’re free! Don’t go back. Don’t lock yourself up again in a dungeon of sin and shame and guilt and hatred and anger and bitterness and revenge and coveting and greed and lust. As Isaiah said, *the Lord has led you out of those dungeons of darkness and death*. He has done **a new thing**. He has made a new you. A new person, with a new life, new food, and a new destiny.

That’s all yours now. *Not yet* in all its fullness and freedom and glory - that will come only in the resurrection. But it’s yours now. Promised. That as Jesus’ death began with His baptism and ended with His cross, so your life began with your baptism and will come in its fullness with your resurrection. He in your place and you in His.

And that's not just your destiny - it's the *reality* in which you now live.

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.