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“All Heaven Broke Loose For You”
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.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.

No one probably noticed. No one probably gave it a second thought. He was just another man. Jesus of Nazareth, Joseph and Mary's boy, if they even knew that much. For most, probably just another face in the crowd. Just another in the long line of those coming to John to be baptized by him.

But John noticed. He had just told the Pharisees and Sadducees that there was one coming, so far mightier and greater than him, that he was not even worthy to untie (Luke 3:16) or carry (Matthew 3:11) his sandals. And then John looked up and there He was! And looking for John to do far more than untie or carry His sandals - He's there for John to *baptize* Him! So of course John objects. ***I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?*** This isn't right!

But it *is* right. ***Let it be so now,*** Jesus says, ***for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.***

And John consents. That is, he lets go of his objections, his logic, his view of what should and should not be. He doesn't argue. He will not exalt himself and his opinion, insist that *he* is right. Instead, he humbles himself to the word of the one who is humbling Himself before John. ***Allow it,*** Jesus said.

So John will do what John was sent to do - *baptize*. Baptize Jesus. For you could, in a sense, say that ***John the Baptizer was really sent to do this ONE baptism.*** For while all baptisms are important, this one supremely so. For this one is to ***fulfill ALL righteousness.*** To make available to ALL the righteousness of God.

Now, it is said, advised, not to speak or write in absolutes. To avoid words like ALL and none, everyone and no one, always and never. Because we change, and things change, we don't know everything, and we don't know what the future holds. And as sinners, we are weak and often fail and fall. So such sure and prideful speech is

foolish for us.

But Jesus is different. What He says, He will do. He will fulfill ALL righteousness. He will fulfill His name. He will make available to ALL the righteousness of God. He will stand with unrighteous sinners in the Jordan. He will heal unrighteous sinners with His forgiveness. And He will die for unrighteous sinners on the cross. The unrighteous sin we have, He will take. And the righteousness we lack, He will give. **Let it be so now**, allow it now, Jesus says. You are not doing this for me; I am doing this for you.

Then he consented. And that's all Matthew says! That's it! No details. It's almost anti-climactic.

UNTIL . . . until after Jesus is baptized and He went up from the water . . . and then, it wasn't that all hell broke loose (that would come!) - **all heaven broke loose! The heavens were opened, the Spirit of God descends like a dove and comes to rest on Jesus, and a voice from heaven says, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."**

Can you imagine being the next person in line? The next to go into the Jordan to be baptized by John . . . wondering if . . . but then, nothing like that happens . . . are you disappointed? Relieved? Doubting?

Jesus' baptism was clearly different from all others. All others that came *before*, but not different than all to come. His was not the one and only, but the *prototype*, the foreshadowing of what Baptism will be because of Him. *Because He's in it.*

And to help us think about this, it's the Old Testament that will help us. If we find the Old Testament roots of what happened here with Jesus and what happened when He was baptized, we can draw a line from the Old Testament to the New Testament to us. And we don't have to guess at this - there are clues in the text, and Peter tell us (1 Peter 3:20-21)! The Old Testament story that corresponds to this, and is completed and *surpassed* by this, is **Noah and the ark**.

At the time of Noah, when it came time to cleanse the earth of evil with water, *the windows of the heavens were opened* (Genesis 7:11). Here, after the cleansing water is poured ***the heavens were again opened***.

At the time of Noah, a dove that did not return indicated when the flooding and destruction was over (Genesis 8:12). Here, ***the Holy Spirit descends like a dove*** to indicate that in Jesus, the destruction of sin would be ended.

Only Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord in his day. Only of Noah was it said that *he was a righteous man* (Genesis 6:8-9). And only of Jesus was it said, ***"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*** The man who was not only righteous, but would ***fulfill all righteousness***.

And then to go a little farther even . . . God sealed Noah and his family in the ark as in a tomb (Genesis 7:16), and God determined the day they would come out (Genesis 8:15-16) to begin to live a new life, just as Jesus was sealed in His tomb and came out on the day determined by God: *the third day*. But for Jesus, not for *Him* to live a new life - there was nothing wrong with His old one. It was for *us* to live a new life!

That's what Paul said in the reading from Romans. ***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.***

New life as sons of God, with whom He is well pleased (Galatians 3:26-27). New life with the Spirit of God who has descended on us in those waters (Acts 2:38). New life for heaven is now opened to us with the forgiveness of our sins (Titus 3:4-7).

And one day, when our bodies are sealed in a tomb, God will determine the day we come out, the day of resurrection, when Jesus comes again in glory. So just as Jesus' *death and resurrection* were the first but not the only; the firstfruits of more to come, so too His Baptism. What happened to Him *visibly* happens to us *invisibly*. When we are baptized, all heaven breaks loose again, and one day our graves will, too. Because Jesus did what He said He would: He has fulfilled ALL righteousness *for us*.

So now, I guess . . . we're kind of like that next person in line after Jesus was baptized. 'Cuz when we're baptized, it's kind of like that - nothing extraordinary is *seen* . . . But we live by faith, not by sight. We know that something extraordinary *did* happen.

So what does that mean for you now? What about this new life we've been given to live? After the flood. After the cleansing. Paul asks this question: ***Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?*** That is, can I do whatever I want and sin as much as I want because I know I'm forgiven? And then he says: ***By no means!*** Or, *never!* Paul uses the absolute. *Never! Never! Never!* Not just because you shouldn't be that way, but ***because that's not who you are anymore***. The new life and Spirit you've been given mean new thoughts and desires that become new words and deeds. Not the same old deeds from the same old person. Christ has done ***the new thing*** Isaiah

talked about, and given that newness, that righteousness, to you. **As a baptized child of God you died with Christ, you are risen with Christ, and you now live in Christ.**

All this makes the Baptism of Our Lord the perfect Epiphany story. For it **reveals** to us this man Jesus of Nazareth as the very Son of God in human flesh. It **reveals** to us what Jesus has come to do, to fulfill ALL righteousness, so that we can be righteous. It **reveals** the reality of Baptism and what happens and is given to us in it. *And it reveals you.* That you enter that water ordinary, but don't leave it that way. You are now a beloved son of God, with His Father now your Father, His righteousness now your righteousness, His Spirit now your Spirit, and His life now your life.

And now He gives you that Body and Blood that was baptized in the Jordan for you to eat and to drink. Because that new life He's given us to live . . . yeeeeaaah . . . What I said I would NEVER do again . . . What I said I would ALWAYS do . . . yeeeeaaah . . . So we come and confess **by the Font** where our new life in Christ started and receive again the washing we need, the forgiveness of our sins. And we **hear** again the **Word** which tells us who we are and the faithfulness of our Father and Saviour. And then we come and receive Him who gave Himself *for* us and gives Himself *to* us to strengthen us to live that new life He has given us.

To be like John . . . in this way: to let go your objections, your logic, your view of how your life should be and what you can and cannot do. To not argue and not exalt yourself and your opinion and insist on your rights. But instead humble yourself to Him who humbled Himself for you. **Receiving** all you need from your Saviour, and **giving** all you have for others. For He has only good for you. He fulfilled ALL righteousness *for you*, and made you His child, and gives you His Spirit, and forgives your sins, and will open your grave and give you eternal life, and who loves you more than you could know. All you need He will provide, and He will *fill* you with His love and life.

So have no doubt and have no fear. No, rejoice! For what happened that day at the Jordan, and what happened on your day at the Font, is the same: **all heaven broke loose . . . for you.**

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.