

Baptismal Identity

Matthew 3:13-17 ✠ The Baptism of our Lord

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Baptism is a doctrine that is hotly debated among many different denominations.
 Many disagree on the nature of baptism,
 Or the benefits it bestows,
 Or even the manner of how the water is applied to the baptized!

But when thinking about the doctrine of baptism,
 There is a very important thing to recognize:
 As Christians, we are followers of Jesus.
 Everything that is His becomes ours once Christ claims us as His own through His means.

Here are three examples of Christ giving us His stuff:

First, the faithful need not worry or be anxious about suffering or death,
 Because the suffering and death we have is not ours, but Christ's!
 His death ends with resurrection – so will ours too.
 We receive the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Second, once Christ claims us through His means, we receive His Father.
 And we can call upon God as Father.
 Our once broken relationship with our heavenly Father is restored,
 through what we receive in Christ.
 In Christ, we receive forgiveness, life, and salvation.
 We receive the heavenly familial relationship that Jesus has.

Third, once Christ claims us through His means, we receive His body and blood
 through the Lord's Supper!
 Christ was sacrificed on the cross, to pay the punishment for the sins of the world!
 Yet, when we come to faith, receive Christ's merciful gifts in the Lord's Supper,
 That forgiveness won on the cross becomes ours.
 We receive what Christ has done.

These three examples show that whatever Christ goes through, we receive too.
 So, let not your mind wonder about the teachings of baptism.

Because the same principle applies: whatever Christ has, we receive.

Let's look at the Gospel text, to see what happens in Jesus' baptism.

We'll examine the purpose and the result of Jesus' baptism.

Then in a different text, we'll examine the commission Jesus has for baptism.

First, the purpose of Jesus being baptized.

As Jesus says in the Gospel reading, He gets baptized to **"fulfill all righteousness"**.

What does it mean that Jesus fulfills ALL righteousness through His baptism?

Even though Jesus is completely righteous in Himself,

He doesn't get baptized because He needs it –

He isn't a sinner in need of forgiveness.

That's surely why we get baptized today,

and also why people came to John for baptism.

But He gets baptized so that He can purify the waters of baptism *for* sinners.

Early Church theologian St. Maximus of Turin describes it this way,

"Christ is baptized, not to be made holy by the water, but to make the water holy,

and by his cleansing to purify the waters which he touched."

Jesus doesn't get baptized to cleanse Himself from sin,

But to cleanse us of sin.

He doesn't take on righteousness in His baptism,

But He leaves His righteousness for us in the water,

So that we get baptized, His righteousness becomes ours.

There's another thing to gauge from the text about the purpose of baptism.

Regarding Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' baptism begins his public ministry.

That correlates to us!

Because our public Christian life begins in our baptisms!

When that begins doesn't depend on anything you are able to do –

Whether you're old enough to speak the words "I believe in Jesus" or "accept Jesus into your heart."

Instead, that completely depends on when Christ claims you as His disciple through water and the word!

For most of us, that happened when we were too little to even remember our baptisms.

But what a joy! That there is never a passing moment without the righteousness of Christ!

Second thing to observe from the text, the result of Jesus' baptism.

After Jesus was baptized, three things happened.

First, the heavens were opened.
Second, the Holy Spirit rested upon Jesus.
And third, a voice from heaven said,
“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”
These three things show what Christ received,
And what He freely gives through baptism.

Through the baptism of repentance administered by John,
Jesus transforms baptism into something else.
It’s no longer just “I repent of my sins, so I’ll go get baptized.”
That’s why John baptized – for repentance.
Many think this is the purpose and benefit for baptism today –
A public declaration of inward renewal and forgiveness.
But seeing baptism as such completely denies the baptism of Christ as something done
for us.
Seeing baptism as such views the baptism of Jesus as something that just proclaims the
ministry of Jesus,
which is certainly something that it does.

But there’s more.
There’s more than just proclamation in Jesus’ baptism.
There’s transformation.
There’s relationship!
Just as Christ was baptized and we see the Holy Spirit descend upon Him and the
Father calling Him His beloved Son from the heavens,
We see that baptism has caused this unique union between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
bestowed on the baptized.

The same goes for us who are baptized –
We receive the Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - in our baptisms.
It may not bear the pomp and circumstance that Jesus’ baptism showed,
But baptism gives us the same things.
And make no mistake! The water in itself isn’t holy and enacting these great things!
But it’s God Himself who has instituted this for His Son Jesus, and for His children!

This brings us to the commissioning of Christ –
Making disciples of all nations through baptism and teaching.
This is God’s plan and design for baptism and what it’s meant to do.
In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus gives the Great Commission,

Telling us to make disciples of all nations by baptizing in the name of the Father, Son,
and Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to observe everything which I have commanded you.
This is the normative action of the church –
Killing the old sinful man and giving life to Christ, received through baptism.

As a result, we bear God's trinitarian name to the world.
Surely we aren't perfect at bearing the name of God –
We bring shame to God's name through our hatred towards each other,
and apathy towards God Himself.
But that's the value in continuing to receive forgiveness in absolving repentant sinners
and giving the Lord's Supper to repentant sinners.
We make receiving forgiveness a habit,
Because we recognize how sinful, wretched, and out of touch with a perfect relationship
with God we truly are.

And through this habit of recognizing our sinful nature,
Repenting of our sins, and receiving the Lord's healing absolution,
We return to the promises of our baptisms,
Living as redeemed children of God.

We must remember our baptisms daily,
Drowning the Old Adam through contrition and confession,
And rise to new life daily through Christ who redeems and sanctifies sinners.

And remember, baptism is not a one-time event,
Or a doctrine that's hotly debated among Christians.
Rather, it is the very identity of our Christian lives,
For here we receive every wonderful gift from God for salvation.
We receive the name of God placed upon our foreheads and hearts,
And we receive a heavenly Father who sacrifices everything of Himself,
To save a world of wretched sinners.

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