

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
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Baptism of the Lord

Genesis 1:1-5

¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Mark 1:4-11

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

"The Crossover Point"

Ah, the Christmas tree is on the curb. The sanctuary has been now fully de-Christmasized. The poinsettias are drooping and the Christmas cards are headed for the recycle bin.

The cookies are growing stale and the rest of the fudge has been put in the freezer for a later chocolate desperation moment emergency. Some of the toys are already broken, and it has only been a couple of days.

We don't want to see it go, but we move on. Jesus is baptized. We have moved from the manger and the wise ones coming from the east to Jesus being baptized. Maybe even thirty years later.

Wait a minute, this is our schedule isn't it? A baby is born—what do we do—baptism. Infant baptism is our way. Little baby Jesus—ah yes, my little porcelain baby Jesus is ready for his annual Styrofoam cradle--pack him in that box and put him away. He could use a bit of baptism to remove his dust.

Yes—but the real Jesus isn't baptized as a baby but as a grown man. Oh, it happens some 30 years after his birth. From birth to baptism all in a few days.

Jesus baptized. To be frank, any thinking person will have some questions at this event. Here we are told John is baptizing at the Jordan and his baptism is a baptism of repentance. People are coming to be baptized, they are facing the truth all of us must face—that we are in a broken relationship with God and sin is a reality in our lives.

Jesus—the Son of God. Fully divine, fully perfect. Jesus the Christ of God, the Messiah, the Sinless One, the perfect Savior, the Lamb of God—baptized? Hmm.....

Why would someone who is sinless need a baptism of repentance? In fact, Jesus did NOT need to be baptized, but he chose to be baptized by John in the murky waters of that ancient river.

For Jesus this moment of baptism was powerfully the crossover point. It was the crossover point in at least for regards that speak to us our about growth with Jesus.

First, this was a crossover point. It was a crossover point at it was a moment of decision.

As best we know, for about thirty years Jesus had remained with his parents in the small town of Nazareth. Faithfully dispensing his family duties and putting in a day's work at home. Legend holds that he had taken up his step father Joseph's carpentry business, and some believe he cared for his mother, sighting a possible early death of Joseph since we hear nothing of him following the birth narratives.

For a long time, he must have been conscious that the time for him to go out was coming. He must have been waiting for a sign. And John's appearing in the wilderness was that sign.

A crossover point. This he saw as the moment when he had to launch out upon his task. A moment of decision.

It was the moment when he decided to take the next step. He decided to grow.

As Christian people, we have decided to grow in Christ. It does not happen magically. It is a decision that we make.

Life is really busy, and life is really complicated.

The bottom line is, we need to recognize that in all that being busy this moment we have arrived at in our lives is not an accident. We are called to this crossover point to make a decision. Are we willing to make a decision that faith development and growth in Christ will be a priority in our living.

Once we make that decision we can then do something about it. And the reality of decisions is that if they are not backed up with action, then we never really decided.

This is a crossover point. It is a moment of decision. We face them everyday—even today. God calls on you to decide today—everyday—the decision is up to you. Decision. That’s first.

Second. Identification. The Baptism of the Lord was a moment of Identification.

It is true that Jesus did not need to repent of sin; but here was a movement of people back to God. That is what was happening with John’s baptism in the wilderness. People were making their way back to God; and with that God-ward movement, Jesus was determined to identify himself.

Jesus was identifying himself as a person who publicly would stand up for God and be counted as one of God’s disciples. He identified himself in his actions as a religious faith seeker of the Creator God.

You see, it is one a crossover point. How we identify ourselves to – even and especially to ourselves matters. Do you understand and see yourself as a member of God’s family? Do you claim your identity as a Son or Daughter of God? That is your identity and you can use it in prayer and you can use it in public too—but, we need to use it.

How we identify ourselves matters. It matters to us. It matters to those we come in contact with. It is a major part of our Christian outlook and witness.

Decision. Identity. And approval. The Baptism of Jesus was a moment of approval. Yes, approval.

No person easily leaves their home and family and sets out for a new life in an unknown place or way. To do that you have to be very sure that you are making the right decision.

Jesus decided on his course of action, and now he was looking for the seal of approval from God. In his baptism came that seal. “You are my Son, the Beloved. With you I am well pleased.”

At the baptism Jesus submitted his decision to God and that decision was unmistakably approved.

Do you get that? That in prayer, in Scripture, in sermon, in each other, in Sacraments, God speaks to us—uttering approval of our decisions to act and live for Christ. God approves of us.

All the time, even though some of our actions don’t fit with God’s calling and design on our lives—still God always approves of us. God always approves of us. We cannot lose that approval. No matter what happens—nothing can wipe it away—not even something we do.

Moments of approval. God speaks them to us all the time; we need to listen for them. God approves of us—that is demonstrated to us in God’s grace and mercy. God approves of us.

See also, that this was a moment of equipment. At his baptism, Jesus was equipped for his ministry of reconciliation which would lead him to the cross and beyond the tomb which could not hold him.

That moment of baptism was a moment of equipment as the Holy Spirit descended upon him. There is a wonderful symbolism here. The Spirit descends on Jesus as a dove would descend. From the very beginning—the picture of the Spirit is likened to a dove as the picture of

gentleness. Jesus will conquer, but the conquest will be the conquest of love.

The Spirit would empower Jesus with the good news of the kingdom of God as a kingdom of love and truth and goodness and justice.

Equipment. Oh, we often think that we do not have the right stuff it takes to make it. We think we just do not have the right equipment to grow and develop in our faithfulness. Whenever we listen to that message we are not listening to the Spirit of God.

We have what it takes. We have more than what we need. We can make it.

The Holy Spirit of the Creating, Redeeming, Sustaining God give us all that we need.

We have the equipment.

We need to believe that we have it and then begin to use the resources God has given us. And growth will happen—it will happen.

The Holy Spirit has equipped you with all you need to grow fully in Christ.

Decision. Identity. Approval. Equipment. All of it—right there in the Baptism of Jesus. And it sets the stage for our living these days. It starts right here—in the water—in our baptism.

It starts with the waters that have washed us, claimed us, cleansed us, commissioned us.

This is the crossover point—this is the crossover point—when we realize that we do not have to be tougher, stronger, better...we already have what we need to grow with Christ.

Just walk with him everyday—and let him walk with you. You have put on Christ in Christ you have been baptized.

This is the crossover point—when we hear it and get it that the Word of God comes clearly and vibrantly to us—we are the Beloved with whom God is well pleased.

God said it in the waters and continues to say it...listen...listen...because this is the crossover point and we are the Beloved with whom God is well pleased. Amen.