

January 9 – 10, 2010 The Baptism of Our Lord
Matthew 3:13-17 “I Am Baptized”

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

John, the last of the prophets, baptizes Jesus and the Spirit Himself descends upon Him while the Father expresses His pleasure. It is the anointing of the Lord. In the watery boundary that separates the wilderness from the promised land Jesus is chosen and marked as the Messiah, the Anointed One. There He takes the sins of the world upon Himself. He will crucify and overcome them. The Father is well pleased in Him because of this, because that sacrifice is work of the Messiah, the will of the Father, the fruit of the Spirit.

The baptism, and indeed, the entire identity, of the Christian flows out of this. By baptism the believer is joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the significant thing. *Do you not know that you were baptized into Christ's death?* The central thing is not faith, ritual, the water, the Word, or the believer. The central thing is always the intervening grace of God that steps in and rescues man out of death through the Messiah. When you were baptized into this faith you put on Christ. You have been forever joined to His death and resurrection. You are anointed, or christened, marked and named by, for, and in Him. Christ is the key thing.

“Repent and be baptized,” says John. Repent means to acknowledge that God is right and confess that his judgment is true when he says that we are all sinners and all condemned. Repent: confess that God is right and you are wrong. Then be baptized. Whoever believes in Jesus Christ and accepts this baptism receives the forgiveness of sins. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit will dwell in him. Faith is certainly part of the equation. But the emphasis is on the objectivity of baptism and the promised presence of the Holy Trinity for the believer. The faith which receives these gracious gifts is itself a gift. It is not as though we come before God with an empty sack and then He fills it. We come empty handed. He gives us the sack. Then He fills it.

When Christ was drowned in baptism heaven opened. When He died on the cross graves were opened and dead men lived. The Father is pleased because satisfaction has been made, the sins of a thousand worlds have been drowned and destroyed in Christ's baptism. Baptism is a washing, but more it is a destruction, a drowning, and a death. Our sin and rebellion are a deadly problem. They destroy life. They kill families. They murder innocence and purity. They require an extreme solution. Thus, the extremity of God's love and desire to forgive, even to the point of sacrificing His own Son in our place. Nothing will stop Him. Satan will not win. God will rejoin humanity to Himself without violating His own Law. He will intervene and make us His. So pleased is the Father with the Son, that He and the Spirit promise to be present and to light upon all who are baptized into Christ.

And Christ Himself is the baptizer. Although this glorious revelation does not now occur visibly, as it did at that time on the Jordan, nonetheless it is what occurs. That is the promise. Christ is the baptizer whether He is seen or not. The Father blesses with His good Word. The Spirit makes the heart His temple. And that is why St. Paul can't even remember who he baptized, because in truth, he never baptized anyone. Christ did it all.

Thus the Baptism of Our Lord is the beginning of the great exchange. Christ is not washed clean, instead He is infected with our sins. He is baptized in our sewer. He takes all our filth upon Himself and leaves the water sparkling clean for us. Our sins wash off of us and onto Him. His holiness covers us and we are clean. The Father will not forsake us. He will not send us to a cross. We will not pay for our sins. Heaven is opened. The Father is well-pleased with us, His beloved. We are made children and heirs by grace. His Name is upon us. Our graves will open. We will follow the Lord Jesus out of death and to His Father and Our Father's home.

In ☩ Jesus' Name. Amen.

