

January 10 - 11, 2009
The Baptism of Our Lord
Matthew 3:13-17
"Part of the Family"
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
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In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text for today is the Baptism of Our Lord from Matthew chapter 3. We will be talking today about how God calls us into His holy family by Baptism, and how that commitment of God guards us all the days of our lives.

I am often amazed at the strange and peculiar things that we are willing to do for our families. Think about it for a minute. What would you be willing to do for your family? For your parents? For your children? For your brothers and sisters? How far would you be willing to go for them? What would you be willing to do for them?

If you are like most people, your answer would probably either be anything or almost anything. Whether your talking about a two year old, a twenty year old, a forty year old or an eighty year old, human beings have an incredible capacity for loyalty and commitment. You would change diapers, go into debt , pay off debts, put up with an amazing amount of really dumb things, thick or thin, good or bad, richer or poorer, you are there.

Why? What would possess you to have this incredible loyalty to people who may or may not reciprocate? Why do you do this? The answer, of course, is family. They're family. In some cases, it may never even occur to you to do anything else. You are going to do what it takes because they are family.

But, of course, you have limits, you make mistakes, and your love only goes so far. While you may show an incredible capacity for loyalty, and you may put up with all kinds of things, it will only go so far. Your love can only go so far and no farther. There are some things you just might not do. Or even if you were willing to do it, you can't. There are some debts you cannot pay. There are some things you simply can't do, no matter how much you want to or wish you could. Because you are a fallen human being, your love has limits. It can only go so far.

But not so with God. In today's reading, our Lord binds Himself to us in a way which hardly seems possible, and certainly is underappreciated and under recognized. Today our

Lord stands in the waters of the Jordan River for you, and is baptized. If you think of it in one way, it seems like a pretty insignificant little event. John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, pours water over Jesus' head in a rite which was frankly pretty common in Jesus' day. Baptism for repentance to the forgiveness of sins was a normal part of first century Jewish practice. It wasn't new or even that unusual.

But when Jesus stands in the water, everything changes. He stands in the water as one of us. John can hardly believe it himself. He even tries to stop Jesus, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" John, you see, recognizes that baptism is for the forgiveness of sins, and knows he needs it and Jesus doesn't. But what John doesn't understand is that Jesus is going to give the very foundation of Baptism by standing in the water Himself in our place.

Jesus then gives the answer, which puts it all in perspective for us: "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Fitting isn't really the best translation there. It would be better to say it is right or perhaps even necessary. The point Jesus is making is that this is what has to happen in order for all righteousness to be fulfilled. In other words, what Jesus is saying is that by His standing in the water, all of your righteousness is fulfilled. All of His works becomes yours by His standing in the water with you.

We're talking about your Baptism, dear friends in Christ. And when we are talking about Baptism, we are talking about family. This is how God grafts you into His family and makes you His own. When you were baptized, God adopted you into His family to be His beloved son, His precious daughter in Christ Jesus our Lord. And with this water, poured over you, God seals His love upon you forever.

Now what this means for you in real, concrete terms is that God is on your side in a way that is way beyond all of the crazy stuff you do for your kids or your parents or whatever relative it is that you take care of. The love that we should have for our family goes out and flows forth, but this now gives us a little glimpse into the love of God. The love of God is so vast, so all encompassing for you, that He will do anything for you. He will pay off your worst debt, forgive your most grievous sins, take you in, clean you up, and make you His own again and again and again.

Frankly, it's a little unnerving, to have that kind of love showered upon us. Yet that is the love God showers upon you in Holy Baptism. St. Paul writes, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD." What baptism does for you is makes your glory be in God, not in yourself and your failings, big and small.

Perhaps Luther wrote it best in the Large Catechism: "Thus we see what a great and excellent thing Baptism is, which snatches us from the jaws of the devil and makes God

our own, overcomes and takes away sin and daily strengthens the new man, always remains until we pass from this present misery to eternal glory. Therefore let everybody regard his Baptism as the daily garment which he is to wear all the time." Large Catechism #83

Dear children of God, cling to your baptism, for it is your glory and your hope for a bright future with Jesus in Heaven. St. Peter writes that Baptism saves us. This is true. By water and Word, God makes you His own, draws you into His family, says to you, I love you with an everlasting love. You are mine forever.

This is what God does for you in Holy Baptism. Believe it for you are forgiven all your sins in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.