

Epiphany I  
The Baptism of our Lord  
January 10-11, 2009

***“A New Beginning”***

Text: Mark 1:4-11

Our Old Testament lesson for today says: *“In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.”* (Genesis 1:1) So starts the Bible and the story of our salvation. God created a perfect world, but it wasn't long before his perfect world was ruined by sin. In order to solve this dilemma he promised: *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head and he and you shall bruise his heel.”* (Genesis 3:15)

This promise is speaking of none other than our Savior Jesus Christ. This Sunday we celebrate the beginning of his work at his baptism. Today we baptize to make people part of God's own family and assure them of the forgiveness won for them by Jesus Christ. It is the promise of that word of God along with the water that gives Holy Baptism its great significance, as Martin Luther points out.

But for Jesus it is different, he is without sin. John the Baptist has made a new beginning in preparing the way for Jesus. As Jesus is baptized, his earthly ministry begins. Putting it in our terms, it is like an ordination or installation, as we will see with Pastor Schnelle this afternoon, but in a much greater way. It has to do with the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ and it is-

## A NEW BEGINNING

### I. The way is being prepared

### II. We have a course to follow

#### I.

**A.** In the lives of both John the Baptist and his cousin Jesus we see the example of humility and service. John the Baptist's life style is set clearly before us in our text. Verse 6 of our text tells us, "*Now John was clothed with camel's hair, and wore a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey.*" In spite of that many came to him. Why? It was because of his message. He continues on and says, "*After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.*" In the Gospel of St. John he says, "*He must become greater, I must become less.*" (John 3:30)

We also see the example of humility in the life of Jesus. At one time as the disciples were debating who had the greatest position among them he said, "*...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.*" (Matthew 20:28) Even the Lord of all saw his life as one that was about service and humility. He even called himself one who was "*gentle and humble in heart*" (Matthew 11:29) What does that say to us? It calls for humility from us. Why? There are two reasons: 1) we are sinners and 2) we have God's free forgiveness.

Saying that we are sorry, truly repenting of our actions is sometimes hard for us. Pride comes as part of our human nature. John the Baptist turned away the Pharisees and Sadducees because they were not repentant. We know something is wrong but we will not repent of it. We invent excuses that allow us to sin

or we compare ourselves to others and say that we are not as bad. We excuse our sin by saying we are being singled out and others are allowed to live, as they want to live. St. John tells us, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 John 1:9)

**B.** The baptism that John was proclaiming was for repentance and also for forgiveness. This is the second reason for our humility. God forgives us sinners not because we have cleaned up our act. If that were the case it would be totally dependent upon us. He does it for the sake of his holy and sinless Son Jesus. Again, this humbles us greatest of all gifts that he gives to us. We have no part in this except that we believe it.

As we follow in the line of John the Baptist and Jesus, we repent of our sins. We know as we examine the Scriptures, that our way is the way of death. There is nothing to be proud of on our part. There is a difficult attitude in the world of today. There are so many that are admired who are arrogant and have no use for others. They see themselves as greater than everyone else. We have no reason to think in that way, when we do, we know our sinful nature has the upper hand in our lives.

We have been changed. At our baptisms we were made God’s own children. Changed and cleansed we have been equipped by him in humble service by his Holy Spirit. We also follow the example of Jesus and others in living the Christian life.

## II.

**A.** Among God greatest gifts to us is that of our baptism. It is one that we identify with Jesus as he was baptized too. His marked the beginning of his earthly ministry and set the way for his temptation by the devil. As the time approached for this to be accomplished, John balked at the idea of baptizing Jesus. St.

Matthew records Jesus response, *“Let it do so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.”* (Matthew 3:13) Jesus did this to fulfill what his Father required and showed his approval by God the Father as verse 11 of our text indicates. The righteousness is one that he now gives to us.

St. Paul says, *“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves in Christ.”* (Galatians 3:27) This is the promise that you have in your baptism. Because of Jesus, God is also well pleased with you. We sometimes forget that as we emphasize that we cannot earn our salvation. By baptism, God marks you as his very own child. You are special. What God requires of you in your stewardship and Christian service is already given to you in your baptism. We dare not neglect the importance of our baptism. Sometimes we can be indifferent towards it. Is it because we view this as a mere ceremony? It is much more than that as sins are forgiven and we are cleansed and become members of God’s family.

**B.** As we now have that as a part of our lives we can follow the examples of John the Baptist, Jesus and other examples of Christian faith that we have seen displayed in our lifetime. St. Paul, in talking about the life of Jesus says, *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 2:3-5) John was humbled by the appearance of Jesus and did not consider himself worthy. Jesus said of John that there was no one greater than John was. (Matthew 11:11)

You are in an even better position than John is. What John promised has come true. Jesus has come as John promised, *“I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”* At the baptism of Jesus, we see the

unmistakable appearance of all three persons of the Holy Trinity. St. Mark identifies who each person is and that God is indeed pleased with his Son, your Savior Jesus Christ.

There is, if you will, a great tradition here. It is one of service. This runs so contrary to our world of today. Everyone wants to get there first, or have the most important position. Jesus said of himself: *“Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* (Matthew 20:28) That is the example for pastors to follow in their work together and for all of us in Trinity congregation. One time, a lady and I came from opposite directions for the same parking spot. I motioned her to take it. Part of my reasoning was that I knew that there was another spot further away. It reminded me of the service that we are called to give as God’s children and of my sinful nature as well. How often are we affected by the world around us even though we want to live humble, serving lives as God’s children? We can thank God always for the forgiveness that is ours in Christ, for as Martin Luther says, *“we Daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment.”* (LSC, fifth petition, meaning)

We have a new beginning every day as we repent of our sins assured of God’s forgiveness in Jesus Christ. More importantly, he makes it possible for us through his life, death and resurrection. Amen.