

## Epiphany 1- The Baptism of our Lord (Series C)

January 10, 2010

Sermon Title: ~Our Identity is in Christ Jesus~

Sermon Hymn: All Christians Who Have Been Baptized [LSB 596]

Sermon Title: Isaiah 43:1-2

Sermon Prayer: May our hearts and minds be at peace with Jesus, who is ascended.

Sermon Outline:

- I. Out of nothing: Isaiah 43:1; I Peter 2:10; Genesis 1-2
- II. In baptism “we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him” (Romans 6:8).
- III. Colossians 3:1-4- Our hearts and minds have ascended with Jesus.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from our Heavenly Father, and from Jesus Christ, His Only Son, our Lord. Amen.

*“And when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’”* That is what our Heavenly Father had to say about Jesus following His baptism.

And, is there anything, any title, any privilege, greater than that? For God, Himself, to declare Jesus as His ‘beloved Son’ and to proclaim He is ‘well pleased’ with Him? That is the greatest, most privileged title and position anyone will receive.

Speaking of privileges, I’ve met and gotten to know a lot of people in my life. From time to time I remember individuals, couples, and families I met years ago. As well, I grew up in a large family. I have two parents who claim me as their son. I have seven brothers and sisters, along with their spouses, who claim me as their brother. A whole bunch of nephews and nieces who refer to me as ‘uncle Aaron’. I also have a father and mother in law.

And, most immediately in my life, I have a wife, who claims me as her husband (I admire her for that). And, a son, and another child on the way, calling me ‘dadda’.

Not to mention everyone here who refers to me as ‘Pastor Schnelle’.

I guess these are all identifiers. I suppose if I were to meet someone new these are all ways I could identify myself. What makes me who I am is the relationship I have with others. And, I’m going to guess that is the first way any of you identify yourself to others you meet.

*“And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’”* That is who Jesus is to our Heavenly Father, His beloved Son.

We are now exiting one of the busiest times of the year; one of the most joyful times too. We are in the midst of January. And, if you haven’t taken down your Christmas decorations, you’re probably giving it serious consideration. But, the days now are cold, dreary for many. Counselors and psychologists say they see increased signs of depression and anxiety at this very time of year.

Could it be that many forget they mean something to someone else? Perhaps. Perhaps many who find themselves down this time of year, or any time for that matter, simply need to hear they are important and valuable to someone else?

*“And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’”* Jesus certainly meant a lot to our Heavenly Father.

Our Old Testament reading, taken from Isaiah 43, speaks to a people who were stubborn and rebellious. They were enslaved, bitter, and in some deep despair.

The several generations surrounding these Israelites had seen the condition of their nation go from flourishing to decay, from a kingdom that was secure and safe to a nation threatened by other kingdoms. They experienced an increase of idolatry, human sacrifices, and a desecration of the Temple.

What was most significant to their situation, and many of them didn’t know this, but they had forgotten, even forsaken, the identity God had given them- the Promise that they were His people, and that He was their God.

I read to you the first couple of verses. *“But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.’”*

Because of what the LORD declared to them, this was a moment of new birth for these people. Simply because of what God proclaimed to them they went from nothing to something wonderful and amazing- people of God. So radical of a transformation the LORD used the words “formed” and “create”. “He who created you,...He who formed you” is not just a empty words the LORD used to make them feel better. But that is truly what He did. He created them from nothing to be His people.

Reminds us of the first 2 chapters of the Bible, Genesis 1 & 2. All things that are, all that exists, came about in full simply by the spoken Word of our Lord. *“Let there be”* the Lord said, and there it was.

Since the beginning that is the very thing God has been doing- creating out of nothing. We read in I Peter 2:10- *“Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

These people of Israel, for generations now, had it declared to them, over and over again, the LORD’s spoken Promise declaring them to be His very own, His treasured possession. So, why did they, so often find themselves in despair, in utter ruin, and enslaved and corrupted by gross sin? Because they had stepped away from the LORD, who time after time, had come to be with them. But, yet their walking away from the LORD did not stop the LORD in doing the very thing He does. It has never stopped the LORD from doing what He does.

We recall from the account in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve stepped away from the LORD by disbelieving God’s Word of warning to not eat the fruit of that particular tree. Their disbelief in His Word led them to exactly what they were forbidden to do. Right there at that moment the LORD could have forgotten them, abandoned them. But, He did not. He walked in the Garden to where they were and declared to them the Promise to send someone to save them.

Nearly four-thousand years later, a child was born in Bethlehem. That child was that very Promise, Jesus Christ, the Son of God in flesh. Made flesh, to dwell with those He came to save, by giving His whole life, to the point of death, as the sacrifice needed to pay the penalty for all men’s rebellion against their Creator. To redeem those who had

walked away from their Creator, and abandoned the relationship He declared to have with them.

In our Gospel for this Sunday we have the account of Jesus' baptism- a washing of regeneration. Jesus did not need to be washed of anything- He was sinless and guiltless. But, He was baptized for our sake, to fulfill all righteousness on His way to the Cross.

It was an amazing moment, friends. In that baptism God Himself connected Himself to us in His Son, Jesus Christ. As our Heavenly Father identified Jesus as His '*beloved Son*' He declared the way the connection He has with us.

It was God's way of saying, this is my Son, He is going to fulfill all that I require, He is going to take your guilt upon Himself. He is going to die the death you deserve. And, in exchange He is going to give you His identity of righteousness and heirs of the Kingdom of God.

Identity is important thing in our lives. I mentioned in the beginning of this sermon the identifiers we use when we meet someone new. And, could that be because when we consider our identity we consider who we are to others.

And, the Lord has been identifying His own that very way since the beginning. As He spoke to the people of Israel through Isaiah, "*you are mine*" He speaks to us now, speaking, declaring, proclaiming to each of us, "*you are mine*".

Is there anything, any title, any privilege, greater than that? Is there any identity of more significance we can recognize about ourselves than the very Words of our Lord, "*you are mine*"?

Right there in the very water of baptism it happened. The Lord promised to forget all your guilt of sin. He promised to look upon you as He looks upon His own Son, as His "*beloved*". With His Words He created. He created you from nothing to be His child, an heir of everlasting life in His Kingdom.

Yes, just as our Heavenly Father descended upon Jesus at His baptism and said, "*You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased*" has He descended upon us in our baptism and declared to us, "*you are my child, with you I am well pleased.*"

Yes, pleased, that is, not because we are sinless. Not because we are guiltless and deserving of such an identification, but because He no longer sees our sinfulness but only the righteousness of His own Son, Jesus Christ.

Again I ask, there anything, any title, any privilege, greater than that?  
No.

Although, how easy it is for us to forget this. It was easy for the people of Israel. It was easy for Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, for Jesus' disciples, for Paul, Titus, Timothy, and the list goes on.

But, that has never stopped the Lord from doing what He has been doing from the beginning, creating. Each time we step away from His presence, each time we abandon the identity He's given us, He comes to us again with His Word of Promise saying, "*you are mine*".

From our Old Testament reading we hear our Lord say to us: "*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.*"

Isn't that what has happened to us, we have passed through the water in our baptism. It was a water that drowns, destroys, and kills. We have pass through the fire, the fire that consumes. Just as Romans 6:28 states, "*we have died with Christ*". In that baptism that old self was drowned, destroyed, killed, and consumed. We went through that with Jesus, yet, Jesus is the only One who suffered.

That Romans 6:28 does not stop with "*we have died with Christ*". It continues on, "*we believe that we will also live with Him*". Yes, Jesus did not remain dead, but was raised. Just as we died with Him, we also live with Him.

And, where is He now? In Israel? No. Hiding somewhere? No. He ascended into Heaven. The amazing thing is friends, every time the Lord speaks to us, and declares us to be His own, He once again gives us a mind and a heart set upon His own Son. His Son who is in Heaven.

What comfort that is, our hearts no longer burdened with the temporal identities this world has to offer, but enlivened with an identity that will never end.

We are told in Colossians, "*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*"

How about that for something to identify yourself to others you meet? How about something like that to lift you up when you are down?

Friends, it is true, we are identified by what we mean to others. My conclusion to that is, when we forget who we are to others, we easily become down. May we all be reminded of the event when our Heavenly Father descended upon our Lord and said, "*You are my Son, with You I am well pleased*".

Jesus' purpose for being there, for being baptized, for living and walking upon this earth was to meet all God's requirements for us to be saved from our guilt, sin, and eternal damnation. They were all met. And, now we have the greatest, most privileged identification, as God's own.

God's own children, not burdened and weighed down with all the things we experience on earth. But, freed and enlivened to fully enjoy heavenly things which have no end. Amen.