

The Joy Of Baptism

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[0 : 0 0] Today's scripture is from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 1, verses 4 through 11. And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

John wore clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message.

After me comes the one more powerful than I. The straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

[1 : 1 1] Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

And a voice came from heaven. You are my son whom I love. With you I am well pleased. This is the word of our Lord.

Thanks be to God. So how many of you remember your baptism? There is a picture I tried to get from my parents' house of me being baptized at University United Methodist Church in Buffalo.

And I am wearing a dress that my great grandmother made, that my children wore. And I was baptized by the Reverend Gordon Vogt, who was the first pastor here at Pendleton.

And as I look and I think about that connectionalism and the way that our baptism connects us all, I think it is amazing. So today we gather with our hearts filled with joy to celebrate the sacrament of baptism.

[2 : 2 1] It's a sacred and joyous moment in the life of our faith community. Baptism is a visible sign of God's grace. The moment when the ordinary becomes extraordinary and joy is unveiled.

So today our hearts are drawn to the banks of the Jordan River, where the most sacred event unfolded. A moment of divine unveiling.

In the Gospel of Mark, we witness the baptism of Jesus. An event that not only marks the beginning of his public ministry, but it holds profound significance for our understanding of redemption and divine identity.

Baptism is more than a mere ritual. It's a profound expression of our faith and our identity as followers of Christ.

It's in this sacrament that we witness the transformation of our lives from individuals into a community of believers. Baptism symbolizes the washing away of our sin and the new birth into God's family.

[3 : 3 2] It's the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us. Through baptism, we experience the tangible and transformative presence of God's grace, initiating us into this holy community.

So have you ever looked at a child or a person after they've been baptized and wonder what happens next? Where will this disciple be headed?

How will they love God and their neighbor? How will this person go out and change the world? At that point, anything is possible.

Sometimes I feel like a parent, and the words of the hymn, Praise to the Lord, echo in my heart. Ponder anew what the Almighty can do.

Baptism is an occasion for pondering and then taking a deep breath because you know that God has something in store and a new adventure is beginning.

[4 : 39] In baptism, we joyfully proclaim the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Through the waters of baptism, we acknowledge our need for a Savior, and we rejoice in the forgiveness that Christ offers us.

That joy of redemption is personal and communal. And as each person is baptized, they become part of the larger family of God.

It's a pledge between God and the person being baptized. And as we sprinkle the water, we symbolize the washing away of their old self and the emergence of a new creation in Christ.

This covenant was not based on our merit, but on God's unending love and faithfulness. We hear in Isaiah chapter 43, verses 1, But now this is what the Lord said, He who created you, Jacob, He who formed you, Israel, Do not fear, for I have redeemed you.

I have summoned you by name, and you are mine. Baptism is also an occasion where the church ministers not only to the people of God, but when the people of God get the opportunity to minister to one another.

[6 : 01] It's that public profession of faith, of hope, of love, when believers make an effort to share that with others, particularly the person being baptized.

In the wilderness, John the Baptist proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Crowds gathered confessing their sins, and they were baptized in the River Jordan.

This baptism, their outward expression of their inner repentance, symbolized a turning point. That they were ready for the transformative work of God in their lives.

As we listen to the gospel of Mark, we witness Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. So John's in the wilderness doing what God called him to do, hanging out in his clothes, eating the bugs.

And we witness the baptism of Jesus. The significant moment in the unfolding plan of redemption.

[7 : 09] Jesus, sinless and perfect, enters the water of baptism, not for repentance, but to identify with us, to sanctify the waters of baptism, and to inaugurate the new covenant with us.

John's humility shines through as he acknowledges the coming of that one that's so much greater than himself. He baptizes with water, but he anticipates the arrival of the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

In recognizing his unworthiness, John points to the one who brings a baptism that transcends the physical and touches the depths of our very souls.

In a moment of divine mystery, Jesus, sinless, without need of repentance, steps into those waters to identify with us.

And it foreshadows his redemptive mission and sanctifies those waters for future believers. And as Jesus emerges from the water, the heavens are torn open and the spirit descends like a dove.

[8 : 22] And God's voice that had been silent for so many years comes down and says, this is my son with whom I am well pleased.

He declares Jesus' divine identity. This is my son. The Holy Spirit changes things.

It works through Jesus to bridge the gap between us and God. Reconciliation with God was possible because of Jesus' birth, his ministry, his death and resurrection.

Not only was this gap first bridged at Jesus' baptism when the Holy Spirit descended from heaven, but it's bridged at his death when the veil in the temple was torn in two.

God claims each one of us through our baptism. In those waters, God speaks our name. He unites us with Christ and grants us the promise of new life.

[9 : 30] He tells us he loves us. He claims us and he is proud of us. Nothing else is needed. No one can take our new identity in Christ away from us.

No matter what names we're called by others or even ourselves, we are beloved children of God. God, we've been adopted into God's family.

God's love for us cannot be changed. And that's what guides our behavior. Because of God's love, there are certain things that we won't do and there are certain things that we will do and certain things that we know that we must do.

Through Jesus, we have a love that will take risks and a family identity in Christ that cannot be broken. Baptism teaches us that we are deeply rooted in the possibility of goodness.

And sometimes that's a revelation to us. It goes against the stain that we have of original sin. And it encourages us to take a risk by going into unknown territory.

[10 : 43] God offers us harmony, intensity, peace, compassion, and justice. Things that sometimes are alien to our world.

So why did Jesus have to be baptized? After all, he was sinless. Jesus says in Matthew 3.15 that he needed to be baptized to fulfill all righteousness.

It was God's counsel. In Luke chapter 7, we hear that the people be baptized of John. In other words, God tells us to repent.

Jesus asked John to baptize him as an act of obedience to God. Jesus wanted to set a good example for us by doing the Father's will.

His baptism also introduced him to John and the people of Israel as their long-awaited promised Messiah. His baptism was necessary to fulfill the requirements of the Old Testament law, which required repentance from sins.

[11 : 53] Jesus had to be baptized because he was born and he died under the law to deliver us from that law, to deliver us from sin.

The Holy Spirit, descending upon Jesus at his baptism, commissioned Jesus for a unique service. He carried the Holy Spirit wherever he went and he gave it to all of those who wanted to receive his message.

And when the Holy Spirit comes upon us, we are empowered to do God's work in this world. Jesus answered Isaiah's prayer that God would come down to earth and be fully present with humanity.

He was and is God's only son in a way that others created in God's image or not. Jesus was the son of God, but that baptism, his baptism gave him the verbal assurance that he was God's son.

He was born of the Holy Spirit, but his baptism gave him the visible assurance that that spirit was present in him. Jesus is baptized and gave him the positive assurances that he would need during his temptation, his time of misery, his sufferings, and his death.

[13 : 23] We long for someone to tell us the truth, even if it will hurt us. And God created that longing in our hearts. We long to have someone who can help us understand what's happening in the world and what we are called to do.

We need to listen to those who preach, who tell us what our path should be and listen to God when they speak the truth.

Jesus and John the Baptist spoke the truth. They spoke of the need for repentance, the step in our journey that leads to baptism by the Holy Spirit.

It requires us to change our direction, to take those steps in that journey. Our baptism with water symbolizes the washing away of the dirt of our old and our sinful life and forgiveness of our sins.

Our baptism and our repentance usher in the Holy Spirit. And when God forgives us, he wipes our record clean.

[14 : 32] He takes that giant bottle of white out and crosses out all of those mistakes that we have made in our lives. Just like the Father forgave his son in the parable of the prodigal son.

Jesus' baptism ushered in a new way of dealing with sin. People didn't have to go to the temple in Jerusalem because Jesus became the new temple.

Repentance is not something that we only do once in our lives and forget about it. It must be done every day because every day Satan is trying to get us to move in a different direction.

And when we come together in worship, God tells us that he loves us. And in return, we worship him with joy and we tell him that we love him too.

Baptism with the Holy Spirit allows us to see ourselves as gospel peacemakers in our world. It allows us to be merciful to those who ask for forgiveness.

[15 : 37] It enables us to speak for those who cannot speak for the poor, the hungry, the oppressed, the prisoners, the marginalized.

It allows us to spread God's love to everyone. So while preparing for this sermon, I saw a short story about a mother at home with her two young daughters one lazy afternoon.

And everything seemed just fine until the mother realized that something was strange. The house was quiet. And if you're a parent or an aunt and uncle or grandparents or you ever had your children in, you know that if it's quiet, it means that they're up to no good.

And so the mother walked into each of the girls' rooms and not finding them there, she started to get worried. And then she heard it, that whispering, that giggling, followed by the flushing of a toilet.

Following the sound, she soon realized where it was coming from. And it was coming from her bathroom. Whispers and giggles, flush, whispers, whispers, flush, whispers, flush.

[16 : 57] Poking her head into the room, she was able to see both of her daughters standing over the commode. Whispers, flush. And one of them was holding a dripping Barbie doll by the ankles and the other one had her finger on the handle.

Whispers, flush. Wanting to hear what her daughter was saying, she slipped quietly into the room. whispers, flush. And this is what she heard.

I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and in the Holy Spirit you go, flush. Flush. We know what it feels like to have life grab us by the ankles and dangle us over those waters of chaos.

And we know that this happens in spite of our faith. faith. And we know that at times it happens precisely because of our faith. And when this happens we can take comfort in knowing that because we have been baptized with the Holy Spirit we have the strength to face all of life's challenges.

Baptism means that God has broken through the barrier between him and us. and in return we are to break through the challenges and the problems of this world with everything that we have been given by the Holy Spirit.

[18 : 22] Saying yes to our baptism means saying yes to facing the challenges of our world and yes to a life torn open by God's love.

Saying yes to our baptism means that our sins have been forgiven and we have been given a new start in life through Jesus Christ. As soon as he was baptized Jesus was on the move and that fits with the urgency of Mark's gospel.

We have a similar calling. We're baptized for action. We are baptized to go out in the world and be Christ's hands his voice and his presence.

We are baptized for the sake of others and the sake of the world. Regardless of what we say or we think we must be bold in our actions and faithful to our calling.

So that way when it's our time and we get to the pearly gates we can hear God say well done good and faithful servant. So as you remember your own baptism today let us rejoice in the beauty of this divine moment.

[19 : 36] The joy of baptism baptism that is a reflection of God's love a celebration of redemption and an invitation to embrace the covenantal relationship with our creator.

May that joy of baptism inspire us to live faithfully love abundantly and walk confidently on our journey of faith. May we see Jesus' baptism as an invitation invitation to embrace the waters of repentance experience the Holy Spirit's transformative power and walk in the identity of our beloved as beloved children of God.

So may we like Jesus find joy in our journey knowing that the heavens are open and the triune God is present guiding us to a deeper understanding a divine love divine peace and divine grace.

Please pray with me. Heavenly Father we come before you with hearts full of gratitude and awe for the divine mysteries unveiled through the waters of baptism.

Thank you for the transformative power of the sacrament a visible sign of your boundless grace and love. Lord we thank you for the words shared today echoing the significance of baptism as seen in the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist.

[21 : 12] And as we ponder anew the depths of your love mercy and redemption may these truths take root in our hearts. We pray for those who have heard the message today whether for the first time or as a reminder of their baptismal covenant.

May the Holy Spirit stir within each soul bringing a deep sense of joy renewal and commitment to walk faithfully in your ways. Lord Jesus we're reminded that baptism is not just an event but a journey a journey of repentance forgiveness and continuous transformation.

Grant us the strength and courage to live out our baptismal calling being your hands and feet in a world that longs for your love. We also remember those who may be contemplating baptism or who are seeking a deeper connection with you speak to their hearts guide them and lead them to the waters of grace where they can experience the joy of being born anew in Christ.

And as we go from this place may the truth of our baptism resonate in our daily lives. Empower us to be ambassadors of your love sharing the good news of salvation with a world that's in need.

We offer this prayer in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. So may the river of life wash all of your sins away.

[22 : 48] May you go with the joy of Christ. We have a few things happening this week. So today we have our mission fair out in the fellowship hallway and I believe there are coffee cakes, snacks and things.

So come join us and see what missions we have that maybe you could participate in church. We have His Only Son Bible Study I believe is on coming up.

There's a coat drive for Niagara Falls the Tough Stuff Bible Study is on the 30th and we have a group again as you heard going today to work for the Bills game to raise money for missions of our church.

So keep them in your prayers this week. So as you go into the week ahead may every water you touch remind you that you are named and you are claimed by God who binds you to this community of faith and all Christians of all times and places in love.

So go forth joyfully because God is with you. Bring peace and love and hope to all you meet and may God's eternal love shine through you today and always.

[24 : 06] Amen.