

Sermon Supplemental

Baptism of Our Lord Sunday
January 4, 2021

Baptism of Jesus

Created by Rev. Thomas M. Glasoe – Interim Pastor of St. Timothy Lutheran Church

++KEY IDEA OF THE WEEK++

THE URGENCY AND IMMEDIACY OF MARK

This Week's Readings: Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Acts of the Apostles 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11



WHAT IS THIS?

Since the pandemic began and we had to shut down worship, I began to develop two documents as a way to supplement the spirituality of members of the congregations I served. Knowing that the shut-down could be a long term proposition, I began to send home two documents that I developed each week in hopes of assisting congregation members in their daily and weekly walk with Christ.

The first document is the Worship at Home. This is a shorten morning prayer worship that incorporates the upcoming Sunday's readings and prayers. It is with my deepest wishes that each member will find time in their weeks to spend a few minutes in personal worship and prayers.

This worship liturgy can be done alone or with others in the household. It can be simply spoken or sung, if you know the tune. You are free to alter it how you need it to make it more spiritual and meaningful for you. This is simply a suggestion.

The second document is this one you are reading. Not all members have access to the internet, Youtube or ZOOM, thus, I am providing a more in-depth look at the upcoming Sunday's texts through my own study and brain.

What you will see each week is my perspective on the Gospel text unless one of the other texts is profoundly interesting to me and I will expound on that. I tend to preach only on the Gospel text each week, so I will write more about the Gospel.

Some of what you see here may make it into my sermons and some won't. This is just a window into how I intellectually approach the upcoming Sunday's texts and where I might go with the sermon.

Lastly, I always want you to ask questions. Socrates said, "An unexamined life is not worth living." Same can be said about faith. A faith not challenged or questioned is really no faith at all. Thus, I hope you will ponder on the questions I pose and chew on it for awhile. There are no right or wrong answers and it is simply there to get you thinking, not to make you feel dumb or inferior. In the end, I hope you find this useful.



THE CORE IDEA

Of the four Gospels, John is all alone. The first three (Matthew, Mark and Luke) are grouped together and are known collectively as the Synoptic Gospels. *Synoptic* comes from the Greek word to mean *overview*. It is closely related to the word, *synopsis*.

Of the three Synoptic Gospels, Mark is the shortest and the only one that does not include a Nativity story. Matthew and Luke presents two different Nativity stories but Mark leaves Jesus' birth out of his Gospel completely.

The Gospel of Mark is the oldest Gospel and it is this distinction that made the greatest impact on his writing style. He didn't have another source to use as a template. He invented the Gospel writing genre and perhaps being first compelled him to not get too lengthy and get right to the point.

The minute you begin reading the text, a trained reader will notice two particular attributes unique only to the writer of Mark. One, he skips the birth narrative of Christ and goes straight to Jesus at thirty years old and standing beside the Jordan River with John the Baptist. Second, is the urgency

of the vocabulary and tone and the pace of the writing.

Mark's usage of the word, IMMEDIATELY, repeatedly in his Gospel tells us that not only is Mark wanting to get us to his overall thesis but that the kingdom of God can't wait! We need to be about getting to Christ as soon as possible and doing God's work with great haste!!

Also, another example of urgency in his writing can be found in verse 10 of the first chapter, when Mark describes the Heavens open up as if it was TORN. To tear something is not a slow acting event but a dramatic and quick instant. One way you could interpret Mark's point is that when Heaven and Earth meets, it is a moment that is quick in occurrence but resounding!

Mark is about two things: One, he is about bringing forth the Kingdom of God to God's people as quick as possible and second, go about the harvest as soon as possible. Heaven can't wait. Lost people who need to hear the Good News can't wait. He is challenging us. How should we help?



THINKING MORE DEEPLY

The word *baptism* comes from the Greek word, *baptizo*. This word has multiple meanings, and it may would surprise you to know that it has over 20 different meanings. Depending on the context of the sentence, it can mean to bathe or to clean or to be reborn. Thus, it is an extremely important word in our Christian lexicon.

This week, as we focus on Jesus' baptism, know that John the Baptist didn't invent baptism, but he drew on an ancient and very important Jewish practice of the *mikvah bath*.

The *mikvah* is the ritual cleaning that all good observant Jews of Israel had to perform before they could enter the synagogue or Temple on Friday evenings. This ritual bath could take as quick as fifteen minutes or as long a few hours. It all depends on how many prayers and scripture readings in done in between the many immersion a person had to perform. They had to immerse themselves at least three times.

As the faithful enters the bath, one is naked and has to completely immerse oneself under water while walking to the other side of the bath and reciting the prescribed prayers.

Even in a man-made bath, the water has to be running and no water can be standing still. That is why Jesus had his baptism at the Jordan River and not at a synagogue. However, if your *mikvah* bath occurs when the river is low, completely immersing oneself could be a challenge.

One had to perform this bath weekly before going to the Temple or synagogue, or after performing an act that is deemed unclean according to the laws of Moses, found in the first five books of the Bible.

For the Jews, the *mikvah* bath is a very serious, time consuming and all-day event that requires a lot of energy and mental fortitude. Thus, when we read the Parable of the Good Samaritan, remember how the first two individuals walked by the beaten man without touching him? Theories have been put forth to understanding why the first two individuals simply walked past the beaten Samaritan. One of the theories is that those were good Jews and didn't want to become unclean.



AROUND THE DINNER TABLE

Our re-creation in baptism is an image of the Genesis creation, where the Spirit of God moved over the waters. Both Mark's gospel and the story in Acts make clear that it is the Spirit's movement that distinguishes Jesus' baptism from John's. The Spirit has come upon us as upon Jesus and the Ephesians, calling us God's beloved children and setting us on Jesus' mission to re-create the world in the image of God's vision of justice and peace. Take time this week with your family over dinner and go over these questions.

According to the law of Moses, touching a corpse or blood renders that person unclean. If that is the case, we can understand the parable all the more clearly and the power of that story is even more potent.

However, for us Christians, baptism has taken on a much more symbolic act than the *mikvah* bath for the Jews. For Christians it has become an entrance ritual into the Body of Christ and the Church of God. Also, the act was instituted by Christ as a way of gaining forgiveness for our sins and a way in which we can find assurance that we are God's children.

Sadly, many people see baptism as an insurance policy and a one-time event in their shallow spiritual development but within the act is a set of promise that we will do what we can to connect with God and the congregation promises to assist each individual to work for the Kingdom of God.

I propose that our baptism was not just a one-time occurrence that occurred either when we were a tiny baby or when we came to faith. It should be viewed as an ongoing event that has yet to finish. Like the Creation story of our first reading for this week, Creation is not done and it is still ongoing. Just witness new lands being made when a volcano is spewing forth lava or when a baby is born.

Baptism means revelation of God's glory on earth and in our lives and it can mean a transformation of our lives from an old childish, sin-filled life to one focused on Christ and the work of the Church. It is ongoing.

If we take our baptism serious, we ought to be like the good and faithful Jews who completely immerse themselves while praying and reciting Scriptures. We should see our baptism as an invitation to a deeper spirituality, a life of prayer, study and supplication.

Baptism is the beginning of the new life in Christ and it is also a transformative moment in our lives. Now, live it and immerse ourselves in the Grace of Christ and His saving Word.

1. God creates order from chaos. How can we participate with God in doing the same? (Gen 1:1-5)
2. Psalm 29 isn't a weather report, but a statement of the power of God. What are today's competing powers?
3. Baptismal candidates declare "I renounce them!" to the powers of evil. What evil(s) do you renounce? (Mark 1:9-11)
4. Jesus' baptism was the beginning of his ministry; how was your baptism the beginning of yours? (Mark 1:10-11)