

The Festival of the Baptism of our Lord
St. Matthew 3:13-17
January 13th, 2021
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

To Fulfill All Righteousness

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

On the eighth day of their lives all the male children of Israel would be circumcised. Already during this Church year, we have seen that practice observed for both St. John the Baptist, when his father Zacharias asked for a writing tablet and wrote down that his name is called John, and then he prophesied concerning the child that he would go before Messiah to prepare His way. We have also witnessed the circumcision of our dear Lord + Jesus Christ on the eighth day after His holy Nativity, on the first day of the new year. We gathered together and heard about our Lord's first act of atonement for us; His first shedding of blood for us poor, miserable sinners.

Circumcision was the means by which the male children, those who would become heads of households, entered into the Kingdom of God. Through the shedding of blood—through the cutting off of the flesh—they were claimed by the Lord God to be a part of His heavenly Kingdom. They were made a part of the promised bestowed upon their father Israel, that they would become a great nation that would be numbered like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore—too numerous to be counted. This circumcision served as a physical sign that they were a part of the Kingdom of the Lord God.

Moses when he led the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt—out of bondage and slavery—brought them to the Red Sea. They were now trapped between Pharaoh's approaching army and the Red Sea. The powers of darkness and evil sought to destroy them; to leave their dead bodies on the seashore. The powers of darkness and evil sought to bring them back into bondage and slavery. The Lord God would not allow that to happen, even as He does not allow that to happen to us. He made a wall of water and dry ground in the midst of the Red Sea for the Israelites to pass through safely, all while trapping Pharaoh's army—the powers of darkness and evil—in the midst of the Red Sea. Pharaoh and his army were drowned and killed in the Red Sea. The Israelites—the people of the Lord God—passed through safely and found life and salvation and deliverance from the bonds of slavery.

This crossing over the Red Sea was for the Israelites a spiritual circumcision. It was for them a baptism; a washing and renewal of the Holy Ghost that freed them from the bonds of slavery. Even as the Blessed Apostle St. Paul writes in the tenth chapter of his first Epistle to the Church at Corinth. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea. They were baptized into the Church—into Moses—in the pillar of cloud that went before them and the waters of the Red Sea. This was their

spiritual circumcision; their baptism. But the people of Israel who were led out of the bondage of slavery to Egypt; who were in bondage to the powers of darkness and evil, rebelled against the Lord God and His good gifts. He desired to lead them into the promised land of Canaan, but they refused to go. They did not trust in the Lord God, but feared the Canaanites more than they feared the Lord God. For this act of rebellion, they were cursed to wander in the wilderness for forty years until that entire generation who had rejected the Lord God's promises had died.

In the Old Testament lesson, we meet the Israelites after these forty years had passed. They were once again confronted with a body of water. This time it was the Jordan River. The river that flowed into the Dead Sea, the former place where Sodom and Gomorrah once stood. Just like at the Red Sea, the Lord God held up the waters, so that they could pass through the Jordan River on dry ground. This new generation of Israelites who did not rebel against the Lord God, but were brought up with His continual presence in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night; who had the Lord God present among them in His mercy seat—the ark of the covenant—and who had the Lord God present with them in His every visible Tabernacle of Meeting, also receive a spiritual circumcision. They received a baptism as they passed through the waters of the Jordan River. Then when they had passed over the Jordan, all the males were circumcized, because they had not circumcized anyone during the forty years in the wilderness. Therefore, they received both a spiritual and physical circumcision at the Jordan River.

St. John the Baptist, whose circumcision and naming we heard about a few weeks ago, begins his ministry at the Jordan River. He preaches repentance toward the forgiveness of sins to all those who came to him from the surrounding region. He baptized those who came to him with a physical baptism. The washing of water symbolized that the sins of the repentant person were washed away. The living waters of the Jordan River symbolized that a new and living heart now replaced the dead, stone cold heart of sin that they had possessed prior to their repentance and baptism. But this baptism was only a physical baptism. It was only a symbolic baptism.

In today's Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew our Lord + Jesus Christ comes to St. John the Baptist at the Jordan River to be baptized by him. He Whose circumcision on the eighth day of His life we witnessed thirteen days ago, now comes to St. John the Baptist at thirty years old to be baptized by him. St. John the Baptist tries to prevent Him. The situation is all wrong for him. He is the one who needs to be baptized by the Lord + Jesus. He is the one who is full of sin; who bears the original sin of his father Adam in his flesh. He needs to be baptized by the Lord + Jesus Who is without sin; Who is perfect and holy. Why does He need to be baptized? He is perfect and without sin. He is the One Who should be baptizing not only St. John the Baptist, but all of us.

Our Lord + Jesus is baptized in the waters of the Jordan River, the tributary of the Dead Sea, the former place of Sodom and Gomorrah, in order that He might fulfill all righteousness. In His baptism He purifies and sanctifies all water to be used in Holy Baptism. He purifies the waters of the Jordan River. These waters flow into the Dead Sea. These waters flow into the place where Sodom and Gomorrah once stood. These waters now purify all sins. They cover over even the most vile and grossest of all sins. The Lord + Jesus in being baptized in the Jordan River by St. John the Baptist, now purifies and cleanses all the sins covered over by the washing and renewal of the Holy Ghost—by Holy Baptism. All those who are baptized have their sins washed away clean. They are now free from the bondage of slavery to sin. They are freed from the powers of darkness and evil. For our Lord + Jesus puts His righteousness into those waters of Holy Baptism.

All of our sins are covered over with His righteousness in the waters of our Holy Baptism. We have put on His righteousness. We bear His righteousness through the waters of Holy Baptism. We have put on the Christ. We have put on His works and merits. All of the works that He did we now bear. They are ours by faith. We now through Holy Baptism have perfectly kept the Law of God. We now

through Holy Baptism have received the just punishment of our sins. The Old Adam in us has been killed and destroyed. Just like Pharaoh and his army were destroyed, just like Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, so too are our sins destroyed and killed through the waters of Holy Baptism. For our Lord + Jesus, the Christ's righteousness covers over all of our sin, and fills us with His righteousness. There is no sin or evil great enough to not be washed away and covered over by His righteousness.

This is why we cling so diligently in faith to our Holy Baptism. Even though it is an event that happens only once in our lifetimes, this water of regeneration—this washing and renewal of the Holy Ghost—brings forth living waters in us daily through our daily contrition and faith. Through daily repentance—through daily living in our Holy Baptism—we daily drown the Old Adam and daily put on the righteousness of the Christ, so that the Lord God heavenly Father does not see all the sin which we commit daily and often, but only sees in us the works and merits of His dear Son + Jesus Christ. Through our daily remembering and living in our Holy Baptism the Holy Ghost removes the heart of stone from us and replaces it with a heart of flesh; a heart that clings to the works and merits of the Christ.

The great news is that this Holy Baptism is not just for the male children, nor is it only done on the eighth day, but it is for all nations, both male and female, Jews and Gentiles, babies and adults. It is for all those who come to the font to receive from the Lord God the washing and rebirth of the Holy Ghost in the waters of Holy Baptism. And it is a gift which we carry with us throughout our lives; we carry it with us throughout our lives filled with sin and shame, so that when we remember that we have been baptized by making the sign of the holy cross, and remembering that we bear the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, we are remembering and proclaiming that our sins have been forgiven because we have put on the righteousness of Christ.

For our Lord + Jesus has fulfilled for this day all righteousness. He has purified all waters for use in Holy Baptism, so that we do not need physical circumcision, but we receive the more glorious spiritual circumcision of our hearts and minds—the renewing of life found through the work of the Holy Ghost. Rejoice then, my dear friends, that we have received this spiritual washing. We have put on the righteousness of the Christ. We have had our sins washed away. We are considered pure and holy in our Lord God's eyes, not because of anything we did, but because He has fulfilled all righteousness for us poor sinners. Thanks be to the Lord God we are in Christ + Jesus! Therefore, let him who glories, glory in the Lord + Jesus for He has fulfilled all righteousness in us through the waters of Holy Baptism. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!