

Baptism of our Lord - January 9th, 2011
Rev. David C. Pelsue, Pastor
Church of the Reformation – Lutheran
Affton, MO

Watermarked and Cross-referenced

Text: Matthew 3:13-17 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. 16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

A watermark is characteristic of fine stationery. It is subtly or invisibly imprinted on the paper and it shows when you hold it up to the light. (*hold up sample- real or computer printed*)

A watermark: identifies the maker of the stationery.

You & I are watermarked. In our Christian Baptism we received the sign of the cross on our forehead & our heart to imprint us as those redeemed (ransomed from our slavery to sin, death, & Satan), by Christ the crucified. The **watermark** of our Baptism **cross-references** us as "children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." (*John 1:13*)

Oh, it's true we're created by God as we confessed in the 1st Article Creed. As Luther defines it - "I believe God has made me & all creatures & has given me body, soul, senses, intellect, & all I need to keep it all going." Yes, physical life is a gift of God's goodness. But you & I as Christians are not just generic copier paper. No, the seal of our Savior is scribed upon us in Baptism. It's our watermark (seen in the heavenly realm). We were **born again** - of water and the Spirit, in our Baptism. **There**, God created the **faith connection** from us to Himself through His only begotten Son, Jesus.

In the Baptism of our Lord, "the die was cast" for His watermark to be placed on us. And like those Epiphany stars in our windows, (*paper stars taped on nave windows for epiphany season*) it is the light of Christ that illuminates this watermark of His cross in us, His Children, for all to see in our living witness for Him.

* Listen to one man's reminiscing: "*Last week I celebrated an anniversary I cherish. It's not the kind of day you light candles on a cake or pop champagne corks — It's not even the kind of celebration anybody else knows about – although a few of you thoughtful people did send me greetings. But, it's still the anniversary of the most important event in my life.*"

It was the sixtieth anniversary of my baptism.

I was baptized at (~~Immaculate Conception Church~~), Maplewood, Missouri, on February 26, 1950, by the pastor, (~~Father John Ryan, with my Aunt Lois and Robert Nathe as Godparents.~~)

Obviously, since I was not yet three-weeks old, I recall nothing of that sacred event. So what? What happened to me that winter day in that suburb of St. Louis was pure gift from a lavishly

loving God. Just as I had nothing to do with the miraculous gift of human life on the day of my natural birth twenty-days prior, so I hadn't a say in the overwhelmingly gracious gift of supernatural life given me by our Father at my baptism.

What happened that cold day in the corner of that parish church where (Bob and Shirley Dolan), my folks, had been themselves baptized, raised (Catholics), and married only ten months before?

Everything happened: – I became an adopted child of God! . . .

– Jesus Christ claimed me as His own, a beneficiary of the salvation He won for me by His cross and resurrection! (That's why we call it a christening, as we become Christ!);

– I became a member of a supernatural family, the Church; – God, my new Father, invited me to spend eternity with Him in heaven!

– Jesus told Satan — who wanted me badly — to get lost, since I now belonged to Christ! (Satan still won't give up!) – The gifts of faith, hope, and charity were instilled in my heart!

Not bad for a wintry day in Maplewood! Every other blessing in life flows from that glorious event.

When I stand before God at the end of my life, He won't ask to see my passport, my stock portfolio, my résumé, my academic degrees, my certificate of priestly ordination or consecration as a bishop. But a baptismal certificate will be of immense interest! . . . We're in God's hands! He's known us from our mother's womb; we've been the "apple of His eye" since then; He washed us clean and claimed us as His own on the day of our baptism; and He wants us on His lap for all eternity. When He looks at us, He sees us as we were on the day of our baptism. guess who???* (Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York)

Hopefully, hearing this will help you appreciate you own Baptism.

Back to our txt:

It was as if all the world had come out to the Judean wilderness to hear John, who was preaching beside the Jordan River. People from all around flocked to hear this prophet & more than a prophet. It was the Spirit of God, who called and gathered them around the Word of God proclaimed by John. They had heard it said by the Rabbi's - "If all Israel would call on the Lord for but one day, then the Son of David, the Messiah, would immediately come". Like Moses at the foot of Mt. Sinai, told the people to consecrate themselves & wash their clothes, & as the Gentiles who came under the Covenant underwent a ceremonial washing away from their old ways, so here is John saying to all Israel, "repent and be washed (be baptized), for the Reign of God is at hand!" John was calling all to recognize and admit their sin, to turn away from it and to turn toward the rescuing God, who said through the prophet Ezekiel:

Ezek 33:11 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'

Like those gathered along the banks of the Jordan to hear the Word delivered by John when our Lord came to be baptized, we too need to hear his voice in our postmodern wilderness. So we

began our morning retracing our watermark and cross referencing our lives once more admitting “if You O Lord kept a record of sins, who could stand? . . . & we confessed that “we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we’ve done and left undone... and we cannot free our selves from our sinful condition.” In confession of our sins we drop all pretense of worthiness and cling to the beloved Son of the Father, who alone has washed us clean & makes us worthy by His righteousness & His sacrifice for us on the cross. Again we retraced God’s watermark and our being cross referenced as we revisited our baptism with the baptismal creed (Apostles’ Creed).

Have you ever thought about the fact that when you wash something, both the thing that needs cleaning and the thing that does the cleaning have to go into the water! So, when John balks at Jesus coming to be baptized by him saying, **"I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"** In other words, “why should the Clean One come to be washed? Jesus answers, **"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."** Not only is Jesus the Clean One, but He’s the Cleansing One - if He does not go into the water - How shall our stains be removed? If our Lord – the Word of God incarnate - does not go in as the *active ingredient*, it’s mere water, and will do little but get us wet. It is exactly **in order to cleanse us** of our sins and **fill all believers** with **His righteousness** that Jesus must be Baptized by John. On that day, by virtue of His entering the water of **His Baptism**, the water of **our Baptism** was empowered to (give us the gift of faith, wash away our sin, and give us the Holy Spirit). As the Apostle Paul says to Titus, it is **“a washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit in us.”**

Here at His Baptism, **Christ identifies** with all mankind, **drawing unto Himself** all our sin and guilt **that He might** at the cross come **under the hammer** of God’s wrath & judgment against us - **that we might** come under **His righteousness**, His innocence, & blessedness before the Father.

Jesus accomplished all this in His baptism **doing Nothing!** He is **passive as He is baptized.** Yet thereby, He accomplishes everything - **for us.** He fulfills all righteousness. So, take off your shoes, people of God -this is holy ground we stand on, next to the Jordan at Christ’s Baptism. Jesus began His ministry the same way He completed it - obedient to the Father’s will, identifying with us - who could not & cannot obey the Father’s perfect will. We would only be marked with the stain of sin and the stench of death without Christ. As His death & resurrection were for us, so Jesus’ baptism is FOR US. **THAT WE MIGHT BE WATERMARKED & CROSS REFERENCED AS Belonging to HIM!** (make sign of + on forehead and heart)

The “US” Jesus spoke of to John (“It is proper for **us** to do this”) connects with US today! In Baptism God **buried us** with Christ into death and **raised us** to new life in the Spirit through the power of Christ’s resurrection! We did nothing, & could do nothing to save ourselves. God has done it all for us in Christ. God’s grace claims us & gives us what is not ours — we are drawn to God as beloved children, no longer enemies, but as watermarked & cross-referenced followers of the Lord Jesus Christ - no longer stained by sin! – but bleached white as snow in the blood of the Lamb.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (3:16-17)

Christ's baptism marked Him as the Messiah for John the Baptist. More than that, His baptism marked Him as one - **of** us, one **with** us and one **for** us. The **Father**, who **proclaims** from heaven His love and pleasure in His only Son, would **one day send Him** to the cross - for us - **that we might** be His sons & daughters **whom He loves** & in **whom He is pleased**. The Holy Spirit here anoints Him for that ministry - to take our place.

Through Christ, the Father **smiles on our Baptism**. There He **placed** on us His **water mark**. **He cross referenced us** as His own - for eternity. And by the **ongoing** power of **His Spirit** at work in us through His Word and Sacr. the light of Christ's Epiphany **shines on** through the **crosses** of our lives. Today we have **opportunity** to demonstrate His **love and sacrifice** to sinners around us - that they might recognize Him through our witness and come to be **watermarked** with the **seal** of His **Salvation in Baptism**. In the name of the Father, and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.