

# Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



**Mark 1:4-11** John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." <sup>9</sup> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

I think we all enjoy the days throughout the year when we mark the anniversaries of special events. For the youngest children in the congregation, birthdays are one of those very special anniversary dates that they just love to celebrate. Those days become maybe a bit less celebratory as you grow older, but then there are other important dates too. Wives hope that their husbands will remember their wedding anniversary year after year. Sometimes workplaces will honor you when you reach milestone anniversaries in your employment. There are the sad anniversaries too, like remembering the death of a loved one. There are the national tragedies which we all remember, December 7<sup>th</sup>, the day which lives in infamy as we remember Pearl Harbor. September 11<sup>th</sup>, a day which if you were alive at the time, you know exactly where you were when the World Trade Center towers were attacked.

And there's one other momentous event in the lives of everyone here today, which I'm sure very few of us celebrate, if any of us celebrate it at all. And it's rather peculiar that of all the anniversaries which we celebrate throughout the year, this one is by far the most amazing and remarkable and life-changing. I am, of course, talking about the day you were baptized. We celebrate the day of our birth—the day we were born to our parents—but how many of us remember the day when we were re-born by water and the Word and adopted into the family of God? Which of those two days is more worthy of our celebration? Our baptisms! For **Baptism is a Life-Changing Event.**

In our text today, we'll be taking a look at Jesus' baptism and see how His was a life-changing event as well; it marked the beginning of His earthly ministry and through it His Father prepared Him for the task at hand. We'll also look at our own baptisms and see what God has done for each of us when we too were baptized, being baptized into Christ.

## **For Jesus: Beginning His Earthly Ministry**

Today's text is very busy. John the Baptist "appears" as he begins his ministry, and we're told people from all over were going out to see him. John's preaching, the people are repenting of their sins and being baptized. There's all this action going on, and then Jesus arrives on the scene, from Nazareth of Galilee. For most of the first 30 years of Jesus' life, he'd been living in that quiet town of Nazareth in the north, in the region of Galilee. He lived there with his mother Mary and his step-father Joseph and the rest of the family. And for 30 years, Jesus lived in relative obscurity. We are given a glimpse into a few days of Jesus' early life when he's age 12 and learning at the temple, and obviously we know a good deal about the first year or so of his life, but other than that Scripture doesn't tell us a ton about

our Savior's early life on this earth. But now, things are going to change. At 30-years-old, Jesus leaves the quiet of Nazereth and begins His three year ministry which ends with Him crucified on the cross.

As Jesus begins this journey toward His death, He first goes and pays a visit to the one who had been sent by God to prepare the way for Him. That was John the Baptist, and Jesus went to him in order to be baptized. We're told that John was ***"baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."*** Understanding his purpose behind these baptisms strikes us as a little odd when we consider that the *sinless* Son of God then came to be baptized next. He had no sin to repent of and no need of forgiveness.

Now in the parallel account of Jesus' baptism from the Gospel of Matthew, we find a few other individuals that came for a baptism, but whom John turned away. Those were the Pharisees and Sadducees, whom John called out as ***"the offspring of serpents"*** (Matthew 3:7), because they were trying to *sneak* in to the waters of baptism. They wanted to receive the benefits of what John was doing, but they had no interest in repenting of sin, because they really didn't think they had much to repent of. And so John refused them. But then here Jesus comes, who truly has nothing to repent of at all, and yet He gets baptized. And we have to ask, "Why? What was the point?"

His baptism was different in that sense; while sinful human beings receive baptism to take away our sins, Jesus received baptism as the one who would take all sins upon Himself. He went and stood in the waters of the Jordan in order to stand in solidarity with us. At His baptism, Jesus is identifying with sinners, afterall, ***"God made Him who knew no sin to become sin for us."*** (2 Corinthians 5:21) Jesus didn't really *need* any of the benefits of His baptism, but we would need all of it. For this was Jesus' declaration that He would fulfill all righteousness in our place. At His Son's baptism, God the Father revealed to the world that He intended to keep His promise in sending this Savior from sin.

In all of this we see that Jesus' baptism was a life-changing moment for Him, it was the beginning of His earthly ministry, the beginning of his three year journey to the cross and grave. But in other ways, Jesus' baptism was a life-changing moment for us as well. You see, as Jesus came out of the water after His baptism, Mark writes that, ***"Immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."*** This is all old news for Jesus, is it not? Of course heaven wasn't closed for Him, that was His home, He came down from there. He was anointed here with the Holy Spirit at His baptism, but it's not as if the Holy Spirit wasn't with Him already up to this point. God the Father announced that with Jesus He was well pleased, but Jesus certainly already knew this to be the case as well! Afterall, He and His Father were one! (cf. John 10:30) As a young boy He was growing in ***"wisdom and stature, and in favor with God..."*** (Luke 2:52)

So none of these miracles are things that Jesus needed as the sinless Son of God, but we certainly did need them. When Jesus stood in the waters of baptism and the heavens were torn open, that was for us. Because of sin, heaven had in effect been closed. We read in our Old Testament reading how God created everything and saw that ***"it was good."*** (cf. Genesis 1:1-5) It was paradise. It was perfection. And then God closed the doors to perfection, the angels stood in the way with a flaming sword, so sinful mankind could not re-enter that garden of paradise. Similarly, our sin closed the doors of heaven too. From that point on, mankind would strive to create paradise on this earth. We all strive to make our houses and our homes little perfect paradises, perfectly suited for us and our families. But we always come up short, and we recognize that our home country is somewhere else.

At the baptism of Jesus, your home was reopened to you. The heavens were torn open, because once more God could look at something on this earth and declare that “it was very good.” That was His Son, the One in whom He was well pleased. For the good pleasure of our heavenly Father was to save sinners like us, and here His Son is beginning to do that very thing. Yes, Jesus’ baptism was truly a life-changing moment. And each of our baptisms were life-changing moments as well.

### For Us: Being Baptized Into Christ

Isn’t it funny how our memories work in connection with life-changing moments? Like with the attack on the World Trade Center towers on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, I’m guessing you all could tell me exactly where you were and what you were doing when you heard that news. As a big sports fan, there are some major moments in sports from my lifetime that when I think about them I can tell you exactly where I was, who I was with, if I was sitting or standing, I remember all of that. There are countless moments that we all probably remember with similar clarity.

But as for our baptisms, most of us here today were probably too young at the time to remember our baptisms. But perhaps you remember the baptism of your children, or a younger sibling, or just another of our congregation here. What was that moment like? Did you see the heavens torn open? Did you see the Holy Spirit descending like a dove? Did you hear a voice from heaven cry out, *“This is my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased”*?

No, of course you haven’t witnessed anything like that, but that doesn’t mean that any of our baptisms are any less amazing than Jesus’ was. The same miraculous presence of God, the same approval of our Father, the rending open of heaven’s doors—this was all present at our baptisms too. In our epistle reading we read, **“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”** (Romans 6:3) What does it mean to be **“baptized into [Jesus’] death?”** It sounds a little strange, but it’s a wonderful thing. We read a few verses later, **“We have been united with him in a death like his.”** (Romans 6:5) Baptism connects you with the person into whose name you were baptized, everything he has or has done becomes yours, God says.

Think of it this way: if you could be baptized into Elon Musk, the newly minted richest man in the world, then you’d be a billionaire many times over, you’d receive all the benefits of his wealth. If you could be baptized into Tom Brady, the Quarterback of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, then for all intents and purposes, you’d be the one with six Super Bowl wins under your belt.

But they’re just human beings. *You’ve* been baptized into the *Son of God!* And that means you get all the benefits from His death on the cross. As Jesus came to the end of His earthly ministry, He was led up Calvary’s hill by the Roman soldiers and nailed to the cross. As He suffered through those long, dark hours, He was paying the price for the sins of all mankind. And when He died, the payment was complete. Here’s the point: *your baptism connects you to His death.* Through baptism, you personally have been “redeemed, restored, forgiven.” Because you were baptized, you can be absolutely certain that your sins also were nailed to that cross. Your guilt also was completely done away with. Your name also has been written in God’s Book of Life! **“Because we have concluded this:”** says the Apostle Paul, **“that One has died for all, therefore all have died.”** (2 Corinthians 5:14)

But so often we think of forgiveness as an ongoing, ever-changing thing, and that’s natural because our sin is an ongoing, ever-changing thing. How frequently I’ve heard the concern, “Pastor, my sins are so many! I just can’t believe that I’m really forgiven.” My question to them is, “Haven’t you been

baptized yet? You have? Well then, the guilt of your sin is gone, covered by the blood of Jesus Christ.” For Jesus’ death is not an ongoing, ever-changing event. It was a one-time, accomplished historical event, at which Jesus proclaimed, **“It is finished!”** (John 19:30) You’ve been baptized into that, meaning your forgiveness is complete, finished, your sin done away with long ago. You can go home and pull out your baptismal certificates and find confidence from God that your sins have been buried with Christ and left there, away from you forever.

Because your baptism was a life-changing event. Sure, it looked rather simple at the time, it was just “simple water” applied maybe by sprinkling, maybe by a full immersion. But when God attached His Word and promises to it, it became much more than “simple water”—it became an eternal blessing. For that means that God was speaking at your baptism too. It means for you the heavens were torn open, the Holy Spirit was descending upon your heart, and the Father looked upon you, saw in you His own Son Jesus Christ, and declared, *“You are my beloved child. With you I am well-pleased.”*

If you have a calendar on your wall at home, flip through it after church and look at all the dates that you’ve likely scribbled into the boxes as your annual reminders. I’m sure there’s plenty of Birthdays, anniversaries, appointments, scheduled visits from relatives. What about the day of your baptism? Is that included in there? If not, I’d encourage you to write it down as an annual reminder, but then also to celebrate it not just on that day, but every day. May we always be mindful of the blessings that God’s poured on us at our baptisms. They were life-changing events. For we were baptized into Christ, we were given forgiveness and covered with the robes of Christ’s righteousness. May we daily think about our baptisms as we confess our sins before God and find confidence in God’s promise that for Christ’s sake, all of our sins have been washed away. We’ve been baptized into Christ! Thanks be to God. Amen.

***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.

Pastor Sam Rodebaugh  
2nd Sunday after Epiphany  
January 17, 2020