

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Baptism of our Lord  
January 10, 2021  
Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran  
***That's my child***

— Mark 1:4-11

Think of the joy a mother and a father have as they look at their child for the first time and as that little one grows and develops. It's not that hard to wave or clap your hands, but when it's your kid and you see them wave to you for the first time, or clap in response to something you say, there is nothing more impressive in all the world in that moment. A parent can look at their own son or daughter with such love and compassion and simply say, "that's my child!" Just a week ago we were still in the Christmas season and we were gazing upon the Christ child in a manger. And you know what Mary thought as she looked at her baby Jesus, "***She treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.***" With such joy she looked at her baby Jesus and simply thought in wonder, "That's my child!" Only one short account of Jesus' childhood is included in Scripture. Luke records the 12-year-old Jesus in the temple and after that account all that is said of Jesus' childhood is this: "***He went down to Nazareth with [Mary and Joseph] and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.***" Mary looked at Jesus the 12-year-old Jesus and with such joy and pride simply thought, "That's my child!"

In today's Gospel from Mark chapter 1, we see something even more profound than the Virgin Mary smiling upon her child in wonder. ***Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 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."*** Even more amazing than Jesus' own mother looking upon him with joy was the voice of the heavenly Father exclaiming like a proud parent, "That's my child."

Maybe you have a picture in your mind of what Jesus' baptism looked like. Mark says, "***Jesus saw heaven being torn open...***" That alone is a signal that something big is about to happen. There are several accounts in Scripture where God speaks from heaven. God spoke to his people at Mount Sinai a millennium and a half earlier and his voice thundered. People were so afraid that they begged Moses to speak to them himself, but not to let God speak directly or they would die. Or think of the instances surrounding Jesus's birth when Angels brought news. Zechariah saw Gabriel in the temple and he was gripped with fear. Gabriel had to tell Mary right away, "Do not be afraid!" When the angel appeared to the shepherds, do you remember how they reacted, "they were sore afraid." When God, or even his angelic messengers talked to people, the gut reaction was fear. And it's obvious why, it's because we are sinners.

Can you imagine if heaven were torn open right before your eyes; how would you react? If God popped in on you unannounced, isn't there at least part of you that would be startled. Sinners cannot stand in the presence of a Holy God. Wouldn't your heart skip a beat in fear as you wondered, "uh oh, what have I done?" On the one hand think of how a child's spirit is lifted when he hears words of affirmation, but how crushing it is to hear words that express disappointment. We can so easily become disappointed in ourselves and in all the ways we fall short. But even more alarming is that with each sin we have disappointed a holy and perfect God. If the heavens were torn open before you and God was about to speak to you, which sins would most readily cross your mind and cause you to hide your face? What words or thoughts would you immediately regret and wish you could take back? It would only be natural for us to have that same reaction as every other sinner to whom God appeared—to be gripped with fear, to be so afraid.

But at Jesus' baptism, it's way different. Heaven tears open and, like no other man, Jesus doesn't have to tremble in fear or avert his eyes from the glory of God. Instead of a thundering voice of a just God, he hears the tender and loving voice of his heavenly Father, "***You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.***" The Father is pleased with his Son. The Son has no regrets for which he has to hide his face. He has no failures for which he has to tremble in fear. The Father speaks not in disappointment or rebuke but with tender love he looks at his Son and with even greater joy than an earthly father, He can honestly say, "that's my child!"

Jesus' baptism has so much significance. It reminds us who he is and that he was equipped for the work he was about to do. But if you are confused as to why Jesus was baptized, you're in good company. The guy who baptized him was perplexed. Mark tells us that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People came confessing their sins and received baptism. But Jesus didn't have any sins to wash away. Mark's gospel doesn't record it, but in Matthew's gospel John protested to baptizing Jesus. He said, "I should be baptized by you and yet you come to me!" Jesus said, "***It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all***

**righteousness.**” In order to fulfill all righteousness, to fulfill God’s holy will in every matter, Jesus was baptized. He had no sins to confess. But we do. He had no sins to wash away. But we do. Jesus was baptized not only as an example for us, but as our righteous substitute. He fulfilled all righteousness, all of God’s holy requirements, in every area where we have ever fallen short.

Apart from Jesus we were lost and condemned creatures, objects of God’s wrath. But through your baptism God has imparted to you Jesus’ perfect life, his every righteous act covers over every unrighteous thing we have ever thought, said or done. At your baptism Jesus stepped into your place so that God sees you as though you have done all things well. Your baptism connects you so intimately to Jesus that what God declared at Jesus’ baptism is declared at your baptism. Instead of a thundering voice of a just God, we hear the tender and loving voice of our heavenly Father, **“You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”** The Father is pleased with you, his child. There is no longer any reason for which we have to hide our faces. There’s no need to tremble in fear over our failures. The Father comes to you in your baptism not with words of disappointment or rebuke. With tender love he looks at you and with even greater joy than an earthly father, he can honestly say of you, “that’s my child!”

As you think of Jesus baptism and cherish your own baptism, here is something else to ponder. After Jesus was baptized he saw heaven being torn open. He saw the Spirit descend on him as a dove. He heard his Father’s voice from heaven. Who heard those words and saw the Spirit descend on Jesus? None of the gospel writers indicate that crowds witnessed it. In both Mark and Luke’s gospel the Father speaks directly to the Son—“You are my Son...” According to John’s gospel, John the Baptist testified that he saw the Spirit descend on Jesus and that’s how John was certain that he was the Messiah. Beyond that we don’t know if anyone else saw and heard those things at Jesus’ baptism. What mattered is that Jesus heard his Father’s words. As a true man he needed that strength and that confidence. Just after he was baptized Jesus was led into the desert and was tempted for 40 days. Through that temptation and throughout the next 3 years of his ministry Jesus had the confidence of his Father’s love and acceptance.

Think about your baptism. Fellow Christians know your baptismal identity, but many others in the world do not. The average person passing you by on the street doesn’t look at you and say, “Hey, that’s a child of God!” Maybe people have viewed you in many different ways. Maybe some have looked at you with indifference, or with little or no appreciation. Some have maybe even despised you and hurt you. Their words have cut you and left you feeling worthless. The World looks at you as a Christian and might see you as weird, or strange, and you name it, but regardless of the what the world thinks, you know who you are. If no one else sees it or knows it, you know it. You have heard God’s promise in baptism. There at the font, God himself looked upon you with wonder and said, “That’s my child.” He still looks upon you today with that same love and compassion, the kind of love that only the heavenly Father can show you. Right now, with tender love he looks at you and with even greater joy than an earthly father, he says “that’s my child!”

Your baptism has so much significance. The Almighty God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—has forgiven all your sins. By your baptism you are born again and made a dear child of your Father in heaven. When you approach the living God in repentance, bringing your own guilt and shame and failure, you hear the familiar voice of your heavenly Father reaffirming his unconditional love for you, his child. When you go out in to the world and face temptations, when you are harassed and helpless, forgotten and despised, go back to the waters of your baptism. And it’s not like looking in a mirror. In the waters of your baptism you see reflecting back at you Jesus Christ and his perfection. You find the strength that can only come from the Holy Spirit. You find the gentle voice of your heavenly Father exclaiming in pure joy, “My child!”

May God continue to strengthen you to live in your baptismal grace all the days of your life. Peace be with you. Amen.