

EPIPHANY 2

Text: Matthew 3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be Baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be Baptized by You, and do You come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. 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."

I have had the great honor in God to baptize a number of people in the last two years. Most of them were young children who I am sure wondered what was going on as we poured water over their heads and anointed them with oil. The others were of course adults but I recall one that really stood out. There was a woman in my Bible class who moved by the spirit asked that she receive the sacrament. Adult baptisms are very different because the individual speaks for themselves and has made the decision to come forward to receive Christ. In either case, it is a moving and wonderful experience for a clergyman because through him, this new child of God is made a member of His family, and the Holy Spirit is imparted to this person making that person one in Christ. It is also humbling because it reminds you of your own unworthiness to follow in the steps of John the Baptist as he baptized our Lord in the Jordan River.

Today however, the world is now full of sects whose sole mission is to dishonor God's Word and Sacraments. Many main-line denominations have relegated the Sacrament of Baptism to be, in their opinion, no more than an external matter that is only symbolic, of no real use or value to the faithful. It is also unfortunate that so many of those who have no church home, often seek Baptism, but merely as some magic amulet of protection, and once the act is completed, all the promises go unfulfilled and they are rarely seen in church again. We often get the requests to "*do my baby*," which we don't turn down, in the hopes that the parents and family will honor the commitments they make in the service.

To the faithful, those who would glorify God, the Lord's Baptism is ever so much more than an external, symbolic matter. Here stands God in His Word. Here is forgiveness and Salvation. In contrast to many of the days we celebrate, this is *A Real Holy Day*.

The Baptism of our Lord is the day the Church sets aside to show mankind, by example, the importance of God's Word when combined with the ways of the world. The renowned reformer, Dr. Martin Luther, stated in regards to the Waters of Holy Baptism: "*...whatever God institutes and commands cannot be useless, but must be an altogether precious matter, even if it were worth less than a straw in appearance.*"

In contrast to manmade religion, in contrast to proclaiming alternatives to the one true God, in faith which God institutes that is not only real, but is also a matter of salvation, we have this important act, given us by our Lord and maintained by the Church as a Sacrament. It is part of the Great Commission given the Lord to us—"Go then to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and teach them to obey all that I have

commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt:28:19-20 TEV)

How many of you think about your Baptism often? Do you remember the date of your Baptism? Do you know where your Baptismal certificate is? If you read a typical certificate like mine it says “...according to the ordinance of Our Lord Jesus Christ, We did administer the Sacrament of Holy Baptism to Jeffrey Wayne Monroe, thereby making him a member of Christ, the child of God, and an Inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven.”

There are a few things that should be recognized when it comes to Baptism. In our Baptism we are connected to Jesus and His Baptism, we are saved from sin, death, and the Devil and we are an inheritor of all the things that are of Heaven. We know that when we were baptized into Christ the Heavens literally opened on our behalf. We can proclaim **“I am one with Christ!”** and I have died in the drowning-pool of Christ’s baptism and so, by God’s grace, I will live forever in Him.

Baptism for Jesus was, and is for us, an *ordination*. With Jesus’ ordination there was a visual commissioning...a commissioning that was passed forward to those who would be *Baptized* into His name. **“As soon as Jesus was Baptized, He went up out of the water.”** Here begins the *Mission of the Cross*.

We get very excited at baby’s Baptism. We dress them in special gowns. We throw parties...but, how many are aware that Baptism is our ordination...a commissioning to pick up a cross...a commission that separates the elect-ordained from the world of sin...separating us from non-believers. The ordained of Christ are to be living examples of what it means to live a life that always glorifies God...always puts His will first. Baptism is an ordination to suffer for His name so that the *Gates of Heaven* might be opened to us now...and in the hereafter. *Baptism* is the crucial identifier. Christians must practice what makes them truly Christian...They must be Baptized as God’s heirs...as was God’s Own Son!

We know what happened after Jesus was Baptized by John, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit, and how a voice from Heaven said, **“This is My Son, Whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.”**

Through Baptism God the Father placed His imprimatur on His Son’s work, an act constituting the whole of God’s Grand Plan. The Lord God Almighty, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has given you this, His imprimatur. He has marked you, He has sealed you, **He has given you a new birth**, He has filled you with His Holy Spirit so that you might serve His purpose.

If the world could see Jesus through our witness, perhaps it will finally realize and come to appreciate that God chose to meet His children in the pouring of water and through His Word. Like the woman in my Bible class, they too would also say **“I need to be Baptized by Jesus!”**

May the knowledge that in your Baptisms you have received the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit bring you Peace...a Peace that is beyond all human understanding...and May it keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus alone. AMEN