

# The Baptism of Our Lord

Mark 1:4-11



## Introduce

In His Baptism, Jesus is responding to God's call. And in this call, Jesus embarks on His ministry that will change the world. His world-changing ministry is not only to us, but through us.

At His Baptism, the Spirit descends into Jesus as a dove and God the Father's voice is heard by Jesus (and the readers of Mark's Gospel) saying: "You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased." While there are many theories surrounding the meaning of the imagery of the dove, there is significance in *how* the Spirit is received by Jesus. Instead of the Spirit coming to rest upon Jesus in a gentle way, Mark shows the Spirit possessing Jesus and throwing Him into the wilderness (see Mark 1:12).

Jesus' Baptism itself, Jesus' reception of the Holy Spirit, and His ascription of sonship by God the Father are all significant features of this text. Each of these, in specific ways, tie in with the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture. By being baptized by John, Jesus answers John's prophetic call and manifests His oneness with the children of Israel. In receiving the Holy Spirit, Jesus takes on the role of the Servant Yahweh, and that of the people of God themselves. With the ascription of sonship Jesus is further identified as having taken on the role of the people of God, as well as that of Messiah and King.

While there are similarities between Jesus' Baptism and Christian Baptism, Jesus' Baptism is nowhere given as a precedent for Christian Baptism. We, like Jesus, receive the Holy Spirit in Baptism, only in our case it is because our Baptism makes us one with Him who disperses the Spirit. Likewise, we receive sonship with God also because we are united with Jesus, who is God's Son. Because of our connection with Christ in Baptism, our Baptism becomes our commissioning for service in the name of Christ. We are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit who empowers us to then serve in Christ's name.

## Equip

**Read Mark 1:4-11.**

There are two transitions taking place at the beginning of the Gospels in general and the beginning of Mark in particular. The first transition is a movement from the Old Testament to the New Testament. For hundreds of years the prophetic voice had been silent in Palestine; there is an eerie silence between the end of the book of Malachi and the first two words of Mark. In what is more than an irony, the first words of the Gospel of Mark echo the first words of Genesis: "The Beginning." God is doing a new thing.

An accurate translation of Mark 1:9 is, "and it came to pass in those days." This phrase also signals that God is about to do something new and important. Verse ten tells of the heavens being split open as Jesus comes onto the scene as the Lord God in human flesh. In a similar fashion the heavens are also rended at the end of the Gospel when the temple veil is torn in two upon Jesus' death. In the Bible's economy of things, the end of days is signaled as being at hand – a new era for God's people.

The New Year is a time for transitions and moving into new things. Consider the new things that are taking place in and around you.

- How do you deal with the times when God seems silent to you?
- How have you anticipated these new things in recent weeks?
- How do you see God at work in the subtle and dynamic changes in your life?

After this several-hundred year silence, John the Baptizer dramatically enters the scene and the voice of God is heard in new and fresh ways. No wonder hundreds of people—including the rich and powerful—left Jerusalem

and the safety of their homes to come, hear, and be baptized. This is the character of the second transition; a movement from hearing God (through the prophets in the Hebrew Scripture) to experiencing God through the Holy Spirit as we see in the passage for today. But the voice of God is not the same as the presence of God.

- How do you 'hear' God?*
- How do you 'experience' God?*
- Could there be a subtle difference between these two experiences?*

## **Go!**

We are called to deeper discipleship in Jesus Christ. Jesus was called to us by the love of God. His entry into the Jordan River was not for the forgiveness of sin—He knew no sin. It was so that God's presence could permeate every aspect of what it is to be human. Jesus will go where we all must go. Even without sin, He will enter into the waters of forgiveness. Sin no longer separates us from God's love.

- Your Baptism was your commissioning service for the sake of the Kingdom (rule and reign) of God. How do the promises made at Baptism move us toward deeper discipleship?
- In what area of discipleship do you wish to grow in the coming year?
- Who are your mentors and partners in this discipleship journey?
- What can you do to recommit yourself to the call of Christ?

## **Prayer...**

**Lord, Jesus Christ, as You came out of the river—the waters of your Baptism, You entered into ministry where You preached, taught, healed, and announced the coming of the kingdom. May Your reign and rule come among us today and in the days ahead. Give us keen insight into our ministry, and at the end of the day, may we hear You say to us, "You are my child, my beloved; with you I am well pleased." In Christ's name. Amen.**

## **Daily Walk...**

(From Luther's Small Catechism, copyright 1986 Concordia Publishing House.)

### *What is Baptism?*

Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's word.

### *Which is that word of God?*

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." [Matthew 28:19]

### *What benefits does Baptism give?*

It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

### *Which are these words and promises of God?*

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." [Mark 16:16]