

**The Baptism of Our Lord: January 8, 2017**

**“You Want Me to do What? You’ve Got to be Kidding Me!”**

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text for this day is from Joshua 3, *“Then Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim. And they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. At the end of three days the officers went through the camp and commanded the people, “As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it.”* This is our text.

Expectations is a very deep and heavy subject. We have expectations about absolutely everything, whether we know it or not. We all expect things of each other. We all expect things of ourselves. We expect things of our children, our schools, our government, our churches, our homes, the world, and yes, even God. We have many expectations, and that is not necessarily a bad thing. When we get frustrated, there was an expectation that was not met. In the face of unreasonable expectations, I have found myself declaring with tenacity and determination, “You want me to do what? You’ve got to be kidding me.”

It is this very sentiment that no doubt was felt by the people of Israel. Joshua just replaced the faithful and seemingly irreplaceable leader, Moses. They had wandered around Israel for 40 years, and now with Joshua at the helm, they are going to cross the Jordan River and enter in the Promised Land. The people are told to keep their focus on the Ark of the Covenant, the very throne of God. They are to fix their eyes upon it, and it will lead them down the right path to the Promised Land.

This sounds well and good, and who wouldn’t follow that command? Before them stands the Jordan River at springtime, and the timing could not be any worse. The Jordan has four sources at or near Mount Hermon and the streams are fed by snow melting from the mountains. The river has a broad outer valley that varies in width from a mile across to 15 miles across. Within this broad valley is a deeper bed and a flood plain that varies in width from 200 yards to about a mile. Every year in the spring, the rains and melting snow of Mount Hermon would cause the river to spill over into this bed with muddy surging waters. The Jordan River itself is between 90 and 100 feet across and up to 12 feet deep. The current was not only swift, but it has a zigzag pattern that causes the crossing of this river to be a treacherous endeavor. In recent times, modern irrigation has

reduced the level of the river, but in the time of Joshua, this would have been a dangerous thing to cross.

If you remember, the spies had just crossed, and they would have been men of great strength and ability, prepared for the physical and mental toil swimming across this mighty river would entail; however, the people of Israel in our text are told to be ready to cross. All people, young and old, women, children, and men alike are to cross this river. The timing could not be any worse for a safe crossing. On the other hand, it could not be any better for a miracle of God.

God gives very specific directions. As soon as you see the priests carrying the Ark, follow them. They will stand in the water and the water will cease from flowing for your safe passage. On the face of it, the people's expectations would be to see God's ways as foolish. They heard the command. They could see the water. What would they expect? "You want me to do what? You've got to be kidding me!"

But God's Words defy human expectations. What He says actually happens. With His throne leading, the waters stop and the people are granted safe passage into the Promised Land.

Things have not changed all that much, have they? Ecclesiastes reminds us there is nothing new under the sun.<sup>1</sup> The Ark points to the incarnation of the Son of God. God in the flesh, Jesus Christ, is the very God of very God. He is God in the flesh and we certainly have expectations of Him, don't we? He has commanded us to make disciples, make students and followers of God, make children of God and raise them, by baptizing them and teaching them all that He has commanded. He has told us the reality of sin, and our sinful nature. We know the sin in the world. We know the trials that Satan throws at us. We know the afflictions and the suffering.

At the same time, we are told to trust. Look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.<sup>2</sup> He says, join my words to water and great things will happen. He himself was baptized and anointed with the Holy Spirit. Christ was baptized, not for Himself, but for us. He stood here in our place, assumed the form of sinful flesh and became the greatest sinner by carrying on Himself the sins of all the world. These He placed in Baptism, and

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<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:9

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 12:2

washed them from Himself, indeed, from us all, in whose place He stood there, so that they might be submerged and drowned in His Baptism.

John cries, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”<sup>3</sup> If Christ is the Lamb of God, then He must of course be holy, pure and innocent; to be the sin-bearer, He must have laid on Him the iniquity of us all.<sup>4</sup> Whoever believes their sins, and all the world’s, are on Christ, and He was baptized, nailed to the cross, and shed His blood for them, in order to cleanse, rectify, justify, and save them, has forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Here in this blessed act of Jesus’ Baptism, we hear the Father say of Him, “I am well pleased.” In this same way, we are command to bring all nations to this font and teach them all of God’s Word. Yet, many still say, “You want *ME* to do what? You’ve got to be kidding me!”

The world sees baptism as a foolish act. How can a bit of water and few words, do anything? Yet our expectations are not in man, they are in God. The same God who stopped the waters with His presence on the throne of the Ark, is the same God who stopped the mouth of Satan and His allies with the throne of His body on the cross. “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise,”<sup>5</sup> and at this simple act, behold what God opens for us at Jesus’ Baptism: All Three Persons of the Trinity are involved!

You know the truth and the reality of Scripture, “[W]hatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”<sup>6</sup> These things all happened at Jesus’ Baptism for our sake, that we might give Baptism high esteem and glorious praise. We see and hear that Jesus not only instituted and commanded it, but also as a man did it Himself from John. Jesus went down into the water and touched with His Holy Body that he might thereby hallow and bless Baptism. Then, for us, we should not doubt that when and where Baptism is administered according to Christ’s command, heaven stands open, and the entire Holy Trinity is present, and He Himself is doing the baptizing.

What then is the reality after the act? What do we expect after baptism? Joshua records a foreshadowing to baptism and aids in our understanding. Joshua records this miraculous crossing, and then tells us what happens after that. The people live in the land of milk and

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<sup>3</sup> John 1:29

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 53:6

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:27

<sup>6</sup> Romans 15:4

honey, but there is still a lot of work to do. There is fighting and wars and opportunity after opportunity where they will have to show their trust; they will show if they trust in God or if they expect more from themselves and trust in themselves. They will be tested over and over again as to where their trust truly lies, as they wait for the consummation of the promise of deliverance.

Again, the same is true for us. We live in a land of promise and plenty. We live spiritually in a time where we are saved, and yet, we wait for the consummation, the fulfillment of the Christ, and His reappearing. We wait for the full and total end of God's promise of His glorious return. As we wait, there is much work to do. We are tested over and over again to show what is truly in our hearts. Do we believe in God? Do we trust in Him and in His promises? Do we actually believe His words? Or do we trust in ourselves more? Do we study and learn His words with diligence, or do we try and spin our own understanding of those words to fit our own purposes? Do we teach all that Christ has commanded? Or do we pick and choose what we want?

Jesus is the only way, this we know. The same God who did heavenly wonders at the Jordan River, was baptized Himself in the Jordan River. This God is with us through means so that we may never doubt His presence with us and His promises for us. In the Ark, God was visibly present with His people so that they would be ever aware of His presence and His generous gifts. Today, His throne is here, this very altar where God's gift of life proclaims His glorious presence with His body and blood to proclaim and give victory of life over death. Here we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Here we see and are reminded of God's presence with us and for us.

The benefit and fruit of baptism is that it saves the one baptized. Where we were formerly children of the devil, of wrath, and of eternal death, by Baptism we are made children of God, of grace, and of eternal life. Baptism cleanses us. It is not a work of man. It is not our doing. It is a work and gift of God. The power comes not from the water, not from man, but from God Himself. For this reason, it has such astringency and cleansing power that when it meets with sin, filth, and impurity, it washes it away, blotting out in an instant both sin and death, and bringing all grace, salvation, and blessedness, and at last eternal life.

This baptism washes us not only into the body of Christ, it washes us into the very family of God. Here, just like the Children of Israel, we keep our eyes on this altar and here He leads us to set our priorities aright. Here we as children become missional. We know of

God's presence, and it forces us to lead others to the same. We know of His grace given here, and we are compelled to share this news with all who do not know it. There is no excuse good enough to willfully reject God's means of grace, or to stay away from the gracious presence of God. We urge others to not reject this grace, because after all, who would want to? God is here, with His body and blood, who would want to deny that? Who of us is so bold to not want to recognize our sin, our weakness, our need for God, and fall at His feet to receive this grace and forgiveness, this life and mercy, as often as possible? Here we stand in awe and faith around the throne of God and keep ever focused on His grace and love in a world fraught with trouble and turmoil.

Here the gracious presence of God is known through the very victory over death given and shed for you. Here the disciples of God are given life through the font and fed for the journey and work ahead with His Word and His body and blood. God is not a God of chaos. God is a God of order. Through these very ordinary means, God has attached His gracious presence. Through these means God has said, "I am with you always, to the end of the age."<sup>7</sup> Through baptism, His preached word, absolution, and the Lord's Supper, we have no reason to doubt these words, rather, we can be comforted in all that lies ahead, because God is with us.

By Jesus' greatest miracle, His resurrection from the dead, you have an inheritance imperishable and undefiled and unfading—kept in heaven for you.<sup>8</sup> You have passed through the waters of Holy Baptism, and thus have died and been buried with Christ in order that you may also rise with Him.<sup>9</sup> Through faith, we look at Satan and say, "You want me to do what? You've got to be kidding me!" and then we keep our eyes on the altar, on the Ark, on the throne of God and wonderfully proclaim, "You have done what for me? Thanks be to God!" Amen

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter 1:4

<sup>9</sup> Romans 6:1-4