

**Baptism of Our Lord Year C**  
**Luke 3:15-17, 21-22; Isaiah 43:1-7**  
**Sermon for Advent LC**  
**January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

Dear sisters and brothers, grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Risen Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

A couple of years ago I was at a conference with other pastor types who were doing mission development work like me. It was a conference on ministry and practice- we talked about why we do the things we do, what is important in our ministry as well as compared different approaches to the beginnings of new churches. It was a gathering with folks from different denominations and was quite insightful. Over one of the lunches, I was talking with a friend when the subject of baptism came up- he was from a non-denominational church and was a bit perplexed by the way we Lutherans approach it. He asked, "what's the deal with you Lutherans and baptism anyway? It's always baptism this, baptism that, the waters of baptism, thanking God for baptism, and it just goes on...what's up?" I just listened and smiled, and he continued- "and then some of you make the sign of the cross on you- you're not Catholic, why do you do it?" I tried to explain to him that baptism for us Lutherans is something we focus on quite a bit because we see it as part of our identity and a sacred act that has to do with our relationship with God. And that the signing of the cross stuff was done I thought because it reminded people of their baptism and of the fact that God claimed them on the cross as his own. He seemed to be okay with that explanation, but afterwards I wish I could have said more. Today, I want to say more- to you- why is baptism something that we focus on- I searched my sermons that I have saved from last year and in almost half of them I mentioned something about baptism, or the promise of it- so obviously it is important to me, and to our faith- but why? Why is it so important- and what is really going on in the act of this holy sacrament that we value as important?

The Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in our Gospel this morning is a great place for us to look for meaning into our very act of baptism, and the affection we seem to have as Lutherans for it. This event in Luke's Gospel solidifies Jesus' mission and identity as the Son of God- God declares that Jesus is truly the one that has been promised and exclaims his pleasure in his Son. One could argue that this baptism of Jesus and the words that God speaks of him is what begins his ministry, seals him as God's own son- truly the promised Messiah- and then sends him off to do what he must with the promise of his very own identity being what gives him strength for the life he will live - there's no accident that the next part of Luke's Gospel is Jesus being tempted by Satan and what gives him the strength to survive is his identity as the Son of God- so it is as if Jesus is anointed and blessed, and then sent to face reality...so too is it with our baptism- we are anointed, and blessed- we are declared children of God and we celebrate in front of our community that because of Christ we are lifted up out of our brokenness and sin- sealed by the Holy spirit and then sent to do what we must do- live out our identity, let our light shine. And the promise of our identity- as God's child is what gives us strength for the life we will live. That's why it's important...that's why we Lutherans make so much of it- because it has everything to do with

proclaiming and clinging to what God has done for us– but there’s more...more to that identity...more to that sacrament...more to what God does for us.

Because of Christ and what was begun in his baptism and finished at his resurrection we can declare in our baptism that we belong to God– that God is well pleased with us and that God will forever hold us and be our God. The reading from Isaiah highlights exactly what it means to belong to God. Isaiah writes, “ When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire, you shall not burn and the flame will not consume you... because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you...do not fear for I am with you.” Wow...that my friends is wow– that’s who God is for you– a God that will not abandon, a God that will not leave you, a God that promises to love you forever. That my friends is the promise of our baptism, that my friends is the promise of your identity as a child of God– that my friends is the best news we need to know– that God is with us...that my friends is the gift of God for us that is a call for us to share that news with those that need to hear it. You see our baptism, and the promise that God is with us and protects and loves us is a call for us to be God’s witness, God’s hands and feet in the world. Are you game?

This week I was reminded of the need for us as a community to be about the business of our baptismal promise– the business of living out our identity. One of our youth sat across from me in my office Wednesday night, obviously troubled about something – as she began to speak I could sense the sadness and hurt in her voice– she explained that she was not feeling close to God at all any more– that her faith had moved from rock solid to a state of disbelief– even wondering if God was real. And she hated it, was disturbed by it. I looked at her and promised her it would get better– I confessed that I have been there too– but that the promise of our God was that he was with her even in her disbelief and that we as a community of Christ, as Christ’s church would carry her faith for her until she found it again. Dear friends, that is who we need to be– people living out our identity, our promise that we proclaim in baptism, that we belong to God, that God is with us– and then living that existence out– for all– especially the ones who find themselves in the midst of very fire God promises to deliver them from – you see we are the ones who will be called to help protect them from that fire– we are the hands and feet of God...let’s be bold, dear friends in who we are and even bolder in our ministry and business of sharing God’s love. God loves you and so do I. Amen.