

The First Sunday in Epiphany
The Baptism of our Lord
January 8, 2023

The Lessons: Isaiah 42:1-9
 Psalm 29
 Romans 6:1-11
 Matthew 3:13-17

The Hymns: # 405 *To Jordan's River Came Our Lord*
 # 404 *Jesus Once With Sinners Numbered*
 # 394 *Songs of Thankfulness and Praise*

The Collect: Father in heaven, at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River You proclaimed Him Your beloved Son and anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized in His name faithful in their calling as Your children and inheritors with Him of everlasting life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord who lives and reigns with the You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Sermon:
 "Like A Sponge"
 Matthew 3:13

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him."

Dear friends in Christ,

Most of you know my father-in-law, Warren Peters. After spending the summer with us, he is now back home in Illinois. One of the things I remember about him is how when my mother-in-law was still alive, Warren always took his place at drying the dishes. Fran would wash them and Warren would dry them. No dishwashing machine in their home. They seemed to actually enjoy this time together – washing and drying dishes.

But washing dishes is gross. The water starts off so clean and the detergent creates pretty bubbles that smell good and glimmer in the light. But one by one, the dishes dirty the water. They defile, they desecrate what was good and beautiful. And then there is the sponge. Oh, the horror of the over-ripe dish sponge! The sponge soaks up and absorbs all the nasty, smelly, gross things. If you do not throw it away in time (and no one ever does), the filth of its rank odor will attach itself to you and you will need to scrub yourself raw to get it off.

With that in mind, let us consider John, Jesus, and what it meant for the Lamb of God to wade into the filth of the Jordan River for us.

John the Baptist was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord." He prepared the "way of the Lord" by proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, a sinner's baptism. Of course, in John's day and in the common Greek language, to baptize was to wash. It did not always have this technical meaning of a holy sacrament of God's grace. It was a type of bath. You would "baptize" or wash your hands before dinner. You would "baptize" or wash the dishes after dinner. And John was proclaiming a baptism, a washing, for sinners, to

wash away their sins, to repent, to turn from their transgressions. Repentance is a turning away from the bad and a turning towards the good. To symbolize this turning, John called people to wash away their old way of life, to wash away their sins.

And then the wildest thing happened, people came. Crowds of people came. People from all walks of life came. People from different cities, different religious beliefs, different backgrounds, different problems, different hurts came. People came out to the Jordan to be baptized by John, to wash away their sins. They came because they were sinners. I know it is not a comfortable thing to say, or to call people, but crowds of people came because they were sinners... *and they knew it*. Maybe they had known it for a long time. Maybe they did not know it until somebody called them out on it. Maybe they knew it because they just had this feeling something was not right. Crowds of people went to be baptized, to have their real sins really washed away.

They had a problem, and John offered them the solution. So, they went to John, and he baptized them, he washed-off their sin. He washed them into the water of the Jordan River. All the filth of their lives left them and went into the water. The greed, the lies, the theft, the hate, the affairs, the disrespect, the neglect of worship, the abuse of God's name, the false worship of phony gods, all of it washed off them, into the water.

And then, when all the people were baptized, the white, spotless Lamb walked into that same, filthy, brown water. You know what an ideal lamb looks like; white, fuzzy, woolly, pure, clean. When all the people were baptized, a brilliantly white, woolly lamb went into that filthy, brown water. And **like a fresh sponge** right out of the package, He soaked it up. The dirt stuck to the Lamb. All the nasty, smelly, gross things that were sitting in the water were drawn to that pure Lamb.

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John the Baptist cried out, "Behold! Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." When all the people had been baptized, when all the people had washed the filth of their sins into the water, Jesus went into the water to draw their sins unto Himself.

Jesus joined Himself to us, to sinners, in baptism. In His baptism in the Jordan, Jesus joined Himself to us and all we do. All our sin, all our inappropriate thoughts, all our misdeeds, all our harsh words, Jesus, the Lamb of God, soaked them all up. Again, Jesus joined Himself to us in baptism. "For our sake God made Him to be sin who knew no sin." Here, in the dirty waters of the Jordan River, Jesus begins His public ministry. His mission to cleanse the world has publicly begun, and He is commissioned by the Father. The heavens open, the Holy Spirit in bodily form like a dove descends, and God the Father speaks: "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

It cannot be overstated how Jesus joined Himself to us in His baptism. "For our sake, He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus joined Himself to us, in His baptism, so that in our baptism, we might be joined to Jesus. He joined Himself to us, and all we do, so that in baptism, we might be joined to Jesus, and all He did, all He accomplished.

Jesus Christ willingly took upon Himself the sin of the entire world. He became utterly sinful for our sake. God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, whom He loved, with whom He is well pleased. And God's Son took on our sin, and He took all that sin to the cross. Micah 7:19 describes what God did with all that sin: He cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. He buried them, just as they buried Jesus' dead body. But three days later, Jesus rose from the dead, perfectly sinless. Those sins are gone. As far as the east is from the west, they are on the bottom of the ocean floor.

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Through your baptism, that new life is yours. Through faith in Jesus, your sins have been permanently washed away, and not only yours, but the sins of the world. If you happen to see a fellow-sinner this week, a fellow-sinner in need of forgiveness, tell them where forgiveness is found. Tell them about the One who washed it all away, by taking it upon Himself. Tell them about Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Son of God, through whom God says to each of us, "You are My child, with you I am well pleased." In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.