

January 10, 2021

Mark 1:9-11

“To Save the World and Free Us All!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Before we consider today where we are in the life of Jesus, let's consider where we've been.

In the gospel of Luke, the shepherds found the baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a stone manger. The next time we see Jesus wrapped in cloth is when he is placed in a tomb cut in stone. Also the Bethlehem shepherds were shepherds who watched over the sheep who were to be sacrificed at the temple.

On the eighth day after his birth, the blood of Jesus was shed in his circumcision. Circumcision is for a sinful male. Jesus is without sin and shows he is sin for us. Jesus, who does not deserve pain or the shedding of his blood, will nevertheless go through circumcision to point to his sacrifice and the pain he will endure for the sins of the world.

After the birth of her first male child a woman was required to remain at home for forty days according to the law. After the forty days she was to go to the temple, along with her husband and child, and offer a sacrifice in keeping with the law. This was required because she had given birth to a sinner. But this was not the case when it came to Mary. She had given birth to the sinless Son of God. Still, her obedience points to the fact that her child had come to be sin for us. Also, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to redeem him by paying a certain sum of money, but Jesus is the redeemer who is our money that purchases us from sin and hell. This was to remind them and us that the Lord had spared the firstborn sons of Israel when he slew all the firstborn sons of Egypt. This was done in view of the redemption to be made in the future by the firstborn Jesus who is our Passover lamb. This redemption money pointed to the suffering and death of the Savior, that is, the price he would pay to buy us back from sin and hell.

The wise men brought gold to indicate his worth and kingdom, also frankincense which is mixed in with sacrifices at the temple as a pleasing aroma, and myrrh which is for burial. Shortly after their visit, king Herod sought to kill Jesus which pointed to his final destination to be rejected and die. But, his time had not yet come. Instead, Jesus is brought into Egypt with the leading of his father Joseph, like the Israelites who went into Egypt under a different Joseph. Jesus is led there so that he may enter into a bondage that he may be called out of Egypt to show that his whole life is one of our deliverance from sin, death, and the devil.

In our gospel lesson last week we find the twelve year old Jesus dead to his parents for three days as he dwells in his Father's house. A twelve year old is considered to be one who has entered into young adulthood. All of this indicates to us the work that Jesus will do when he becomes a full adult. After three days of being dead to his parents, they find him alive. The adult business of Jesus is death and resurrection.

Can you see the pattern? The work of Jesus is on display in the events of his early life. Today we are at the Jordan river. What do we find here? It is at the Jordan that Jesus is baptized with a baptism of repentance. But what has Jesus done that requires repentance? The Father declares, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Once again, Jesus makes it plain that he has become sin for us. The Father is not pleased with us, but is pleased with his Son who does everything right. In obedience, Jesus

will fulfill all righteousness by repenting in the Jordan, for he is making it clear that he is carrying the blame for all of our sins. Jesus is baptized and makes it manifest that the sins of the world have been given to him. He will take those sins to the cross. Jesus' baptism and the cross go together. For Jesus, baptism means the cross.

Jesus says in Luke 12:50, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how pressed I am until it is completed." The Savior had already been baptized in the Jordan, so we know that he is not speaking exclusively of his baptism in the Jordan. Rather, he is talking about the sin he carries in his baptism to be paid for at the cross once and for all. For Jesus, the cross meant condemnation and death. For us, it ultimately means forgiveness and eternal life. The baptism of Jesus and the cross is **To Save the World and Free Us All!**

When I was serving my vicarage in Texas I can remember going to the place where the muddy Mississippi River flows into the Gulf of Mexico. What struck me most that day was watching a guy wade into the water with a white T-shirt. When we came out of the water, his white T-shirt was solid brown. A portion of the dirt was now on him and, in some very small sense, he had made the water cleaner than what it was before.

When Jesus goes into the Jordan river he absorbs all of the filth of sin and becomes the filth of sin for us. All of the filth of the past, present, and future was placed on him so that the water of our baptism might be a water that makes us clean. When that cleansed baptismal water touches us, all of our filth is completely washed away for it was placed on Jesus. We are made clean. Heaven is opened for us. He took the solid brown shirt so that we may be given a white one. Kurt Marquart writes:

We may think of our Lord's baptism as a great tide that washes the world's sins onto Him and sweeps Him (and them) to the cross. It is precisely at His baptism, therefore, that Jesus stands revealed as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). From the cross, however, flows to us the saving tide of our baptisms (1 Peter 3:20-21!), full of God's mercy, forgiveness, and life ... This biblical understanding of the relation between Christ's baptism and ours is solidly entrenched in the mind and worship of the church. The ancient Christian poet Coelius Sedulius says it in his great Epiphany hymn: "Within the Jordan's crystal flood/In meekness stands the Lamb of God/And, sinless, sanctifies the wave,/Mankind from sin to cleanse and save." (*The Saving Truth*, Luther Academy, pg. 89)

Yes! The baptism of Jesus and the cross was **To Save the World and Free Us All!** And that salvation and freedom from sin and hell is given to us in the baptism that Christ himself instituted before he ascended into heaven. The power of his baptism is the power of ours. The water of our baptism gives forgiveness, new birth, the Holy Spirit, and salvation. As I said a few moments ago, when that cleansed baptismal water touches us, all of our filth is completely washed away for it was placed on Jesus. We are made clean. Heaven is opened for us. As Paul writes in Romans 6, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life ... one who has died has been set free from sin."

Having now been baptized and made participants in the burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we live our Baptism everyday. In the face of daily sin and Satan and an accusing conscience, Luther would repeatedly say: “I am Baptized!” This is how we are to understand our Baptism. As the *Small Catechism* states: “What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” In this you will notice the ongoing reality of our need to lean on this washing everyday. Faith is fragile and is in constant danger of being lost. The exercise of our baptism is clearly seen when we daily confess our sins and rest in the washing that has been empowered by Jesus’ baptism and cross.

Baptism is not a one time bath but a bath that is always there so that we do not despair as a result of our sins and evil desires. The *Large Catechism* says: “In this way one sees what a great, excellent thing Baptism is. It delivers us from the devil’s jaws and makes us God’s own. It suppresses and takes away sin and then daily strengthens the new man. It is working and always continues working until we pass from this estate of misery to eternal glory (LC IV 83).”

Heaven has been opened to us as heaven was opened when Jesus was baptized. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit to be our prophet, priest, and king. This summarized his entire work for us. The Holy Spirit has also come to us that what is opened may not be closed and so that we may enter into the paradise that has been earned for us by Christ. **To Save the World and Free Us All!** That is what our baptism is all about. May we give thanks to our heavenly Father that he has saved us by his Son. And may the Holy Spirit strengthen our faith so that we may be brought to the resurrection of our body and unto life everlasting!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott