

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Baptism of Jesus -- January 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008

### **Matthew 3:13-17**

<sup>13</sup>Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. <sup>14</sup>But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

<sup>15</sup>Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

<sup>16</sup>As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. <sup>17</sup>And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

This is the first Sunday of the Epiphany season. Epiphany means "manifestation or revelation". The Gospel lessons throughout the Epiphany season deal with the parts of Jesus' life where he reveals himself as the Christ, the promised Messiah. With this in mind we can see why the Christian Church has continued to see the importance of spreading this Epiphany message of Christ to others. This is what we call mission work, and it flows out of the love that we have from God. What is mission work? It is similar to the word Epiphany which means to reveal. We are revealing Christ as the Savior of the world, as we tell others of him and his work. The text for this morning deals with Jesus' baptism. This event in the life of Christ is a beautiful Epiphany message as we see Jesus reveal who he really is. What Jesus reveals to us will be our theme:

#### **Theme: Jesus Is the Promised Messiah**

- 1. Jesus tells us this himself**
- 2. The Father and the Holy Spirit tell us**
- 3. Let us go and tell others**

As we look back through some of the history leading up to this point in Jesus' life, we remember that not much was told us about Jesus' early years. He grew up pretty much like any other child spending much of his time in the privacy of his hometown of Nazareth. This early time in Jesus' life had a purpose. This was all a time in Jesus' life where he was preparing himself for the ministry that His Father had sent him for. At the right time, "**Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.**" John was sent into this world to prepare the way for Christ. This he had been doing as he was preaching repentance and the baptism for the forgiveness of their sins. Now Jesus comes to John himself and asks John to baptize him. John at once objects saying, "**I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?**" Jesus' response is very important. He doesn't say that what John spoke was wrong. John doesn't deserve to baptize Jesus, but that wasn't the main point in this incident. Jesus doesn't confess his own sins, and lead us to believe he needed this baptism to forgive his sins. We know this isn't the case, because Jesus didn't need forgiveness of his sins.

Rather Jesus gives this order, "**Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.**" This tells us the reason why Jesus came to be baptized, "**to fulfill all righteousness.**" Here was the beginning of his public ministry. All of his life, of course, was a part of his redemptive work, including his birth and early life. But now he publicly claims to be the promised Christ, the divine Substitute who takes the place of each and every sinner. He now tells us that he came to live and die in the place of all people. There is much to be said about this point concerning the wonderful blessing that

Christ lived and died for us. We need God's help, because we are not perfectly righteous. That's why Christ came and was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. He was the Christ, the Savior of the world. He publicly made this clear at his baptism.

## 2. The Father and the Holy Spirit tell us

John recognized that Jesus was greater than he was, and he in humble obedience baptized Jesus in the Jordan river. Immediately after the baptism, **"Jesus went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'**" Though we stand in awe and wonder at the mystery of the Triune God, and we cannot in our wildest dreams understand the mystery of the Trinity. Here we see two things which are perfectly clear. Jesus and John the Baptist see the Holy Spirit descend in the form of a dove upon Jesus. This is what Scripture calls **"the anointing with the Holy Spirit and with power."** (Acts 10:37-38) This is his formal and divine installation into his Messianic office. The Holy Spirit confirms with his presence the claim which Jesus just made. Jesus is the Christ of God and the Savior of the world.

More than that the Father adds his approval to the person and work of Jesus by his voice from the opened heavens, **"And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'**" This is the Father's direct and personal testimony to the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was true God. It reassures us that Jesus is in truth the eternal Word made flesh, as we read in the first chapter of John's Gospel. This is the Father's personal testimony to the fact that Jesus was the true Messiah and Savior of the world. In other words, the Father says in effect **"THIS JESUS REALLY IS THE CHRIST!"**

Now to bring this to our level or into our lives. Has there been a real Epiphany in our hearts and lives? Do we see him by faith always and daily for what he really is, and what he really means for us? Does the joy which comes as God revealed himself to us in his Son control and guide our every action? Let's divide this into two areas. The one deals with the fact that Jesus is true God. If he truly is the Christ whose coming was prophesied about in the Old Testament, and as Jesus clearly told us at his baptism, and as the Holy Spirit and God the Father also told us, then we have every reason to give him more than lip service on Sunday morning. We can claim in all boldness and confidence that Jesus is true God. If we take away the fact that Jesus is true God (As some religions do), then he is no greater than any other religious leader. Either Jesus is true God and the Savior of the world, or he is an imposter or religious fanatic.

The answer is clear from what God has given us in the bible. The answer is there for all to read. As we look through scripture we see that Jesus was able to do all things. He could heal the sick and physical handicap. He could perform all kinds of miracles. He was able to control nature and all other things. Yet mankind in all its hatred towards him could not put him to death, until God's appointed time. And as we continue through this history, we remember the first Easter morning where we saw Jesus in all his power and deity conquer death for us, and showed that he was alive. We Christians know all these facts well, but do we sometimes become bored or calloused with how familiar they really are? Do they

lose the impact that they truly bring to us as sinners? Do we see this morning in God's Word that Jesus tell us he is the Christ and that the Father and Holy Spirit also tell us this? Let us daily pray to God so that we always are filled with joy and thanks, when we hear these wonderful words about Christ. We always want to remember that Jesus was more than just a human being. He was true God, and was able to accomplish all for us perfectly.

The second thought that this text brings out is that we all know these words are true. We have been taught this from early on. We also know that our Sinful Nature sometimes leads us to get bored or lazy with this truth. But we need to expand on this truth that Jesus is Christ. Is it enough to know this fact? Even the demons knew Jesus was the Christ. We need to realize that Jesus has been revealed to us in his Word. We need to realize that we still are sinners and are guilty of sinning. We are nothing on our own. We are nothing, except lost sinners. With this in our hearts, we need to humbly fall before the cross and look to Christ for pardon and forgiveness. This is the heart of the Christmas message. This is the heart of the Epiphany message. This is the heart of the Lenten message. This is the heart of the whole precious message of the Gospel. Jesus came to save us and all people from our sins.

### **3. Let us go and tell others**

Do we truly know Jesus as our Savior? Does he guide us in our lives? Then let us show this in our hearts and lives. Let us show our faith and joy in a life that is dedicated to our Lord and Savior. LET US TELL OTHERS ABOUT CHRIST. The sinner who has come to know of Jesus as the true Savior through the gift of faith is no longer a slave to sin. At this time he is a wonderful servant of God who has set him free. In this way we are all servants of God. Our lives are like a daily sermon which has as its central theme the confession of our faith -- JESUS REALLY IS THE CHRIST! With this in mind what are we telling others through our words and actions? Do others see that we are filled with the love of Christ? Do others take note that we are different in the fact that we live in this world, but we are not a part of this world? Does our example lead others to ask us about the reason for our joy? Our Christian lives are like a day-by-day sermon which tells others about our Christian faith and love.

Just think of those times when our friends or people we work with or others that we may know go through times of troubles and hardship. We can look at all that happens to us and to others as something that comes from God. We may not always understand them and in our Sinful Nature may even question God at times. But we still have the final assurance that in the end we will be with God on the Last Day no matter what happens on this earth. This is what may lead us to be a shining example in times of troubles. This may lead others to ask how we can be so happy or upbeat in all this misery. We can answer them by telling them that we are not strong by ourselves, but that God is our only strength. God's Word is our firm foundation. The assurance is ours and it guides us in all that we do and say.

We can also use this opportunity or any opportunity to witness to the love of God in the form of Jesus our Savior. By the grace of God we have the true faith which assures us of heaven. We also have been blessed with the privilege of being God's tools to tell others of this same message. Let us look to God in prayer and ask him to give us all the strength we need to tell others. It is the souls of dying men that we are speaking of. We are followers of Jesus. We do not have to wonder who this man called Jesus is. We can say with confidence that JESUS REALLY IS THE CHRIST. We can see this in the words of

our text for this morning and in many place throughout scripture. With the strength that God daily gives us in his gracious gospel let us take this epiphany message which was revealed to us and to all people. It is a wonderful opportunity for all of us. Amen.