

“Our Redeemer Has Come”

Mark 1:4-11

During the Advent season, we spoke of John the Baptist as being the dominant Advent figure. His calling was to “prepare the way for the Lord.” His ministry was meant to prepare not just the children of Abraham to receive the Christ, but all of the children of Adam. God had promised to Adam that He would send His Son as the “Seed of the woman” who would redeem all of God’s children from our slavery to sin. And at Christmas, we celebrated that our Redeemer has come. For unto us a child is born; unto us a Son is given.

But John is not only an important Advent figure, he is also a major character in the Epiphany season. The Epiphany season is where Jesus is revealed as the Christ, the Redeemer, the Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Our Redeemer has come, and He has revealed Himself to us.

During the Advent season, we spoke of how strange and odd that the Redeemer of the world would be born as the child of a girl from a tiny little out-of-the-way town like Nazareth. That is not the kind of place one would expect the King of Kings, the Son of God to live.

Today, we witness the beginning of Jesus’ ministry – His Baptism. Christ’s Baptism is a marvelous event; yet it is a little puzzling for several reasons. First, why did Jesus Christ, the Son of God, someone who was totally innocent of all guilt, need to be baptized by John? Wasn’t John’s baptism a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” [Mk. 1:4]? Jesus certainly had no need for forgiveness. He was blameless of any sin.

He was totally innocent. Baptism washes away our guilt. It is puzzling that the sinless Son of God would be baptized.

Also, as we are now in the Epiphany Season which is the period of the church year when we focus our attention on the events of Christ's life when He was revealed to the world. At His Baptism, Jesus was revealed as the Son of God in spectacular fashion. God the Father Himself speaks from heaven. The Holy Spirit descends like a dove. The three persons of the Trinity are all present and active – just like we heard in the account of creation from Genesis.

God the Father, the architect of the universe, oversees the creation process – with the spirit hovering over the waters. God the Son speaks all things into existence. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are present at creation. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are present at Jesus Baptism.

Jesus kicking off His ministry in this manner should not be puzzling or surprising. It is important that God continues to present Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit the way he always has. But where this happened makes no sense from a public relations standpoint. Once again, Jesus is in an out-of-the-way, isolated place. This wilderness in Israel is bare. There is nothing out there. This is not the place you start a popular movement. Yet, there was a crowd present to witness this event.

Mark tells us that “all Jerusalem was going out to [John]”. There is nothing out there that would entice a person to walk the 12 miles from Jerusalem to the Jordan River – except the Word of God was being preached; people were being washed clean of their sins; hearts were being prepared for the coming of the Christ. How many miles would you walk so that you could hear the Word of God being proclaimed? That is a bit of a serious question that we should ask ourselves. Where is hearing God's Word of promise on the scale of priorities in life? I had an older member in Mellen whose family would walk 7 miles down the train tracks when the

roads were closed from snow, so that they could go to church and hear the Word of God.

It's not as if I could imagine anyone here who would consciously say or even think that participating in God's Word and Sacrament is a low priority. It's not that other things are overtly deemed more important; it's just that other things become more pressing. There is always that project or that game or that late night out on Saturday that comes first.

Even though it was an inconvenient hike, all of Jerusalem was going out to hear John preach his baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. The guilt of sin; and the Word of promise being proclaimed; this is what brought the crowds out to be baptized by John. It was the guilt of sin and the Word of promise which brought Jesus out to be baptized also, but for different reasons. Jesus never sinned; He was blameless in that regard. But he was not innocent, because He was guilty of all our sin.

He took upon Himself all the sins of the world, none of which He had committed, carried them to Calvary, and allowed Himself to be nailed to the cross as the perfect sacrifice to cover and pay for all of those transgressions. He carried the guilt of sin; He is the Word of promise – the Word made flesh who dwelt among us. He chose to stand accused and place the burden of our sins upon His shoulders, and in exchange He clothed us in His perfect righteousness and holiness.

In His Baptism, Jesus Christ's true nature is revealed to all people: He is the Son of God, He is the Savior of the world, He is our Redeemer. As soon as John baptizes Jesus, God the Father speaks from heaven and says, "You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased."

The Father in heaven is "well pleased" because the Son whom He loves has willingly accepted the humiliating, painful task set before Him. The Father in heaven is "well pleased" because the Son whom He loves has willingly traded places with each of you, so that your sin is no longer on you,

but rests solely upon the shoulders of Christ.

He willingly stands between you and the wrath of God's Law pointing at the guilt of your sin. He has shielded you from that wrath and judgment. That is the reason He came. That is the reason Jesus was baptized. At the Jordan River, Jesus took the sin of the world upon His shoulders.

Your salvation is complete in Christ. There is nothing that you can do to make yourselves more forgiven. When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, He made it possible that you can be washed clean. Jesus walked away from His Baptism carrying the sins of the whole world. He is the Redeemer whom God has promised would come and fix God's fallen creation.

That is what John is alluding to with his comment about not being worthy to untie the strap of the Redeemer's sandals. The best example of this is seen in the book of Ruth when Boaz fulfills his duty as the kinsman-redeemer, buys the land, marries Ruth, and continues her dead husband's family tree. I mentioned this at our second midweek Advent service. To make this transaction complete, in the presence of the elders of the city, Boaz takes off his sandal. That is how the redeemer was identified. John says, "I am not worthy to stoop down and untie His sandals."

On the day that Christ was baptized, He began His earthly ministry. Our Redeemer was identified. God Himself speaks from heaven and says for all to hear, "You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased."

Why was He "well pleased"? At Jesus' baptism, God's plan for your salvation was set in motion. There was nothing that could prevent God from fulfilling His promise to Adam to restore the fallen creation, defeat Satan, and bring forgiveness and eternal life to Adam and his children. Our Redeemer has come. Amen.