

“Who Are We?”

Luke 3:15-22

Standing out on the banks of the Jordan River, many of the people were excited and wondering if John the Baptist might possibly be the Christ. Like Jesus, he was now 30 years old and seemingly came out of nowhere to speak words with authority. The crowd was looking for the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One promised to Adam and Abraham; the One of whom all the prophets had foretold.

But when the true Christ came, many of these same people who wanted John to be the Messiah doubted and even scoffed at the idea of Jesus being the true Messiah. When Philip first told Nathanael that the Messiah, “the one Moses wrote about in the Law” was Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael replied: “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Others looked at the Lord and said: “Isn’t Jesus the son of Mary and Joseph. We know about them and the real reason they left town to go to Bethlehem. We know they weren’t married at the time she conceived. Their son is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God?”

When the wise men came to King Herod the Great (as he was known) and told him of the star signaling the birth of the King of the Jews, Herod had the priests show him the writings of the prophet Micah that foretold of this birth of the Son of God and where it would happen. But rather than worshiping the Lord, Herod made plans to kill the Christ-child. When the wise men failed to return with the desired information, Herod's contempt for God was so great that he had all of the young boys of Bethlehem put to the sword.

Christ coming into the world or into your life will always be a source of conflict. Jesus says, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." God's Word cuts to the heart and divides. St. Paul says, "The sinful mind is hostile to God." As we look at the world around us, it should not amaze us that God and His Holy Word would be held in contempt by the majority of people. Herod's reaction to Christ coming should be expected. What should amaze us is that any of us have been redeemed at all – that any of us have received this great gift of faith and forgiveness.

It is good to remember what St. Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast" [Eph. 2:8-9]. John 3:16 gets posted at all the football games, and I love those words of the Gospel. But there is a reason I put Ephesians 2:8-9 on my business cards. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works."

Who are we that God should humiliate His Son by sending Him to live on this earth? And then humiliates Him further by heaping the sins of the world upon His shoulders at His Baptism, as Christ accepts His ministry and role as the final Lamb of sacrifice. Who are we to deserve such love?

Who are we? We are the sons and daughters of the Creator of all things. You have God as your Father. That is who you are. Since the day of your Baptism, you bear His name. He has placed His seal upon you and called you His own.

In Baptism, Paul tells us that life-changing things happened. This is not just some initiation ritual that lets you be part of the club. You were baptized into the death of Christ. You were united with Him on the cross. You were buried with Him, “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.”

In Baptism, God changed you. He washed you clean of all your sin. He rescued you from death and the devil. As, I mentioned before, St. Paul said, “The sinful mind is hostile to God.” The sinful mind does not want to change. The sinful mind does not like the new man.

When Herod the Great’s son, Herod Antipas, had committed adultery and John the Baptist spoke out publicly against it, Herod and his sinful mind did not want to change his evil ways. He locked John in prison – and later ordered up his head on a silver platter.

Baptism is meant to bring change. It immediately brings change

through the washing away of sin and rebirth as a child of God. In some of the older baptismal rites, the pastor would perform an exorcism on the child because of Satan's presence. Today, we ask, "Do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways." And if the candidate for Baptism cannot answer for him/herself, a sponsor will answer for them.

Baptism is a moment of conflict because Christ is entering upon the scene and casting out Satan. You get crucified with Christ. Your Old Adam drowns and dies. But the conflict rages on. As Luther says, "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."

Every day, Christ's presence in your life creates conflict. We are at war with the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature. The world's utter contempt for God should not surprise or amaze us. We are Adam's children and are born with the desire to place God at a distant second behind "good ole number one." What is amazing is not that so many have rejected the Holy Spirit.

What is amazing is that so many have been saved in spite of our blatant imperfections. Faith is truly a gift from God. And what a joy it is this morning to celebrate Christ's Baptism and rejoice in the grace of our own Baptism – as we carry with us the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God placing that seal upon lets us know who we are. Amen.