

Sermon – Isaiah 42:1-9; Matthew 3:13-17  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
Baptism of Our Lord – Year A  
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“Let It Be So Now”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. The people, Matthew tells us, have been going out to the Jordan from Jerusalem and all Judea. By the dozens, hundreds, thousands, they have gone under the water, repenting of their sins and seeking a new direction for life. One after another they have gone under; one after another they have come back up. While the experience no doubt produced a mixture of effects and emotions for each individual, to onlookers it must have seemed incredibly monotonous. One after another, *ad infinitum*. And then, something different happens. John recognizes this cousin of his; the people see them speaking with one another, though most surely could not have heard their exchange. Then, just like the rest, under the water he goes. But when he comes up, everything is different. It's unclear if they or only he sees the tear open between this world and the next. Perhaps only the newly baptized sees the Spirit descending like a dove. But everyone hears the voice, for the voice is addressed to everyone: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” It must have caught them off guard, unawares. One can imagine them looking around, wondering who spoke the words. After all, as we well know, sometimes it can take a while to figure out who the Speaker is!
2. Of course, there is no election to contest here, no votes to be whipped, no gavels to be pounded. The words attest to the identity of the Word, the Father electing the Son as his beloved, sealed by the presence and power of

the Spirit. This Son is *the* Son, the beloved. This name “beloved” echoes the meaning of King David’s name, showing forth that this Jesus is the coming King, the One who will restore Israel. This is One, finally, in whom the heavenly Father can find pleasure and take delight. This One, unlike all the rest of the endless procession of penitents, is holy and righteous. So much so that one wonders why Jesus had to be baptized.

3. This question was on John’s lips, and is often raised by people today when this passage comes up in study or conversation. Jesus wasn’t sinful; he had no need to repent. Why did Jesus need to be baptized? Jesus answers John: “Let it be so for now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Okay, but what does *that* mean?
4. Earlier this week, many of us were watching live when Damar Hamlin, a safety for the Buffalo Bills, suffered cardiac arrest in the first quarter of a Monday Night Football game. It was a situation without recent precedent, but one for which the league’s medical personnel had trained. An amazing array of medical resources was brought to bear, helping Hamlin survive and, as the week has gone on, to take steps on the long road to recovery. But there has been more to it than medicine, or so it seems. Accompanied by the hashtag #prayersfordamar, people have been praying fervently for this young man’s recovery. On Thursday, at the conclusion of a lengthy press conference, a reporter asked a final question, wondering if Hamlin’s medical team could feel the effect of all these prayers. Without hesitation, the answer came: Yes, absolutely.
5. In Jesus’s baptism, the separation between heaven and earth, between us and God, begins to tear – a rending that will become complete as Jesus dies, and the Temple curtain is torn in two. The power, presence, and promises of God begin to flow into all this broken world. This is not to say that prayers will always be answered to our liking, or that if we have enough people praying,

we can force God's hand in one direction or another. Illness and mortality remain part of our world. It is simply to say that in this world where so many things have, can, and do go wrong, in the coming now of Christ the tide has turned to right, and the power of God is at work in amazing, and sometimes miraculous, ways. God in Christ is righting the ship, and in healing and hope we see signs of this greater promise.

6. To win our salvation, God in Christ assumes the fullness of our humanity. Embodied, Jesus takes on our frailty and mortality, our suffering and our sorrow. And yes, even our sin. Did Jesus commit sin? No. He is the spotless Lamb, without blemish or defect. It is not his sin for which he repents in the Jordan; it is not his sin he carries to the cross. It is ours. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Jesus the sinless One takes our sin into the river. He repents and emerges with life pointing in a new direction for all people. Jesus, who alone is righteous, fulfills for us God's will and conveys to each of us the righteousness of God. In Christ, God is setting things right.
  
7. John, objecting to Jesus' desire to be baptized, says that things should be the other way around. He's right, to a point. John needs to be baptized into Christ, and so do we. But only after Jesus has been baptized, first at the Jordan, and then in his death and resurrection, for it is into his dying and rising that we must be baptized. And so we have. In baptism, our sinful, mortal selves have gone under the waters of the flood, and we have emerged with the promise of life, abundant and eternal. It is not water alone that does this, of course. It's what's in the water: Jesus, the Word. Martin Luther writes in the Catechism that it is not water that does such great things, but "the word of God, which is with and alongside the water, which trusts this word of God in the water," that grants new birth in the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit that descends upon Christ at the Jordan descends upon us as we are baptized in the name of the

Triune God. You, in Christ and by the Holy Spirit, are now named as God's beloved child, too.

8. Through his death and resurrection, which his baptism prefigures, Jesus will finally tear through all that separates us from God, earth from heaven, in a new creation in which we shall share the life of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Jesus' baptism, we see this life opening up for us, and we are invited into the mysteries of God's triune life. We overhear God's triune conversations as Father speaks to Son, bonded by Spirit. God's words to the Servant echo from Isaiah's exile to the Jordan's banks to now: "I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." God's Servant has been born into this world as the Christ, our Lord. As the people overheard this divine speech long ago, we see the divine speech incarnate and fulfilled in Jesus, the One who tears through that which keeps us from God, draws us into the Triune life of God, and pours forth the righteousness of God, the righteousness that is making all things right. In Christ who knew no sin, your sin has been left entombed under the flood. Baptized and believing, you live anew in Christ, righteous for the sake of the spotless Lamb. Christ did not need to endure baptism, nor did he need to climb Golgotha's lonely hill. But he let such things be so for now, that we may be alive in Christ forever. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.