

*Luke 3:15-17, 21-22. <sup>15</sup> The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."<sup>21</sup> When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

The wait is over, the season of wonder and anticipation that is Christmas, has come and gone. If we haven't already packed up the decorations, we will soon. But as children of God there is certainly still plenty of reasons to wonder and marvel at the goodness of our God, isn't there? He came to this earth. Jesus, the Son of God, came to this earth to be the Christ. He came to be one of us and live for us. He is the one who was sent to save us.

Too often many move on quite quickly from the light and warmth and energy of Christmas to the cold reality of different things. Like a bunch of decorations packed away we might also be tempted to put away the wonder and marvel for a time, maybe until Easter or next Christmas, even. There may even be this tendency in our worship or in our daily spiritual lives to put away, to pack away, the wonder and amazement of our God and thus we fall into a type of listless holding pattern until the next Holy Day.

Dear friends, even after the decorations have been packed away, and the lights taken down or turned off, let us ponder in our hearts with wonder, with ongoing wonder, about what this all means. Let us prayerfully and with great appreciation consider what God does for us in Jesus the Christ. Let us follow him from the manger, to the river Jordan, to Cana and throughout Galilee and Samaria and Jerusalem, and let us watch and listen as Jesus the Christ preaches and teaches and makes it known that he is the Christ. Let us take notice and listen as Jesus comes to preach and teach and live out this amazing life-changing, life-giving message that he brings.

The son of Mary is the Son of God. This is the one who was chosen to save us. Jesus is the promised Savior, and we can see so clearly from this account before us today that God wants his people, God wants all people to take notice, to behold, to see, to hear, to pay attention to this good news.

*And so let us: **Prayerfully consider with great wonder what God does for us in Jesus the Christ.***

- 1. God sent his Son to gather us to himself.**
- 2. God sent his Son to open heaven for us.**

Our lesson reminds us that John the Baptist had come with his unique style and direct message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins and this had become what everyone was talking about. There was this buzz, this excitement, that was tangible, that was palpable - think about the past week and the constant buzz and anticipation leading up to the Vikings playoff game, it was what kind of like that. This is what the people were talking about.

Eagerness and wonder swirled in the air with a flurry of excitement and anticipation. Our lesson opens with these words. <sup>15</sup> ***The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.*** John spoke with power and authority, and the people stood up and took notice. There was this buzz, this excitement and anticipation.

And John would speak to the anticipation of the people. He spoke so that all would hear. We are told, ***“John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”*** John’s preaching and baptism had captured the attention of many. Many had come out to the wilderness to hear John and there they heard about their sinfulness, they were confronted by their unworthiness, their impurity before the holy God, and then they were invited to dip into the Jordan river as John proclaimed forgiveness of sins. The people were blessed with this wonderful opportunity, this renewal, this refreshing message and John had this very tangible way, in baptism, to point the people to this need of forgiveness and the good news of salvation and love that God had for his people in Christ.

Baptism is still one of those special moments in life. The message of sin and forgiveness are on display in this beautiful visual aid of grace. Water and the word are present and the name of the triune God is spoken. We sit up and pay attention, friends and family gather for this special event, necks crane up and to the side to see over the shoulder of those in their line of view. There is something very special about all it, a certain wonder, a tangible joy. We have been privileged to see this wonderful event in this church recently (and God willing we will again rather soon). But do we always really appreciate what happens here? And just as importantly do we take that wonder and joy with us, or like Christmas ornaments or a baptismal gown, do we pack it up and put it away in storage to be taken out only once in a while like a seasonal ornament or fragile family heirloom. We recognize that it is precious but we forget or neglect to take our baptisms regularly so that we may consider what all this means for our daily lives.

In baptism the Holy Spirit, new life, forgiveness, are given. Faith and the blessings of Jesus’ work and ministry, his life and death were delivered to you and sealed for you for a lifetime, when that water touched your head. With wonder and joy

let us consider what God does for us in Christ! And the Baptism of Christ helps to put that into focus and on display for us.

<sup>21</sup> ***When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.*** Marvel at these words. With the same type of joy and wonder that we hold in our hearts as we kneel at the manger, stand at that Jordan River and see how Jesus comes into this world of sin for you. Take notice of what happens here. He comes to bear your sins, to carry out the work of salvation for all mankind. ***When all the people were being baptized Jesus was baptized too.*** He was numbered with all the sinners. He stepped into the human experience to bring comfort and healing, forgiveness and love to all of us. God sent his Son to gather us sinners to himself. A holy God reached out to save you. The one who stepped in the Jordan River as one of us, had come from God and he had come with this purpose: to save us from perishing, to give us life. John would speak of the Christ in this way. <sup>17</sup> ***His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn.*** He came to gather us to himself and that is even more remarkable when we consider what we deserved by nature. John tells and warns all those who would listen, ***“but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”***

Without Christ we were all like chaff, unworthy of God’s love and attention, destined to be tossed aside into the fires of hell. We were born in sin, born without spiritual life and yet in God’s grace and mercy our LORD reaches out to us with word and sacrament to give us life. Through his message of salvation, he breathes into us life and value. He not only steps into our existence to be born, but he came to preach and teach, to live and obey. And through word and sacrament he also steps into our individual lives so that we might be spared from the punishment that we deserve. He carries my sin and yours and is washed and refreshed in the waters of the Jordan. He connects you and me to his grace when that water touched your head when his word touches your heart. Marvel and be amazed, sit up and take notice, crane your neck and open your ears to hear and to see what the LORD has done for you.

***“As he was praying, heaven was opened”*** Luke tells us, <sup>22</sup> ***and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”*** In this unforgettable scene God makes this much clear: Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. The presence of the Spirit in the form of the dove makes us look and see, as heaven opens the voice that comes down confirms it and those who listen, listen with wonder. ***“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”*** As the Son prays to his Father, the Father speaks to his Son, he prepares him for his ministry, he encourages him in his work that will be done – work that will be done for us. Jesus is prepared, he is publically anointed and we can’t help but marvel. God sent his Son for us.

And in your baptism these words from heaven are echoed for you. The Father from heaven speaks to you. In your baptism God says to you, *"You are my son!" "You are my daughter!" "I love you."* And we are sent on our way. Lifeless chaff, lost and condemned creatures, made children of God and then sent out to live for him, blessed and made new each time we consider what God has done for us in baptism and in Christ. Let us marvel at what this means for our daily lives.

As the Son prayed to his heavenly Father we can pray to *our* heavenly father. You are his child. The sins that separated us from our God are washed away. Hear and see this precious truth each day, God sent his son to gather you into his family and there is now a line of communication that is open to you. When the weight of the world was on his shoulders Jesus prayed to his heavenly Father and you can do the same. When sin and guilt weigh you down, when trouble and turmoil fall upon your shoulders, you have this privilege through Christ, sealed to you in baptism. And so pray, dear child of God, pray. Speak to your heavenly Fatherly boldly and confidently, heaven is open to you, you have been made his through baptism and now your father hears you, and he gives you his Spirit to encourage and comfort, strengthen and renew you.

We were not even worthy to stoop down in fear in the presence of our God and yet in his great love for us he came down to our sinful earth to live as one of us and do these great things for us. Jesus the Christ, came to save us. He came to preach and proclaim and live a life-giving message of salvation for us. He came to give us eternal relief from sin by his life, death, and resurrection, he came to give us comfort and relief in the gift of faith and prayer. He came to gather us to himself and open heaven for us.

Let us prayerfully and eagerly consider each day what God has done for us. Heaven is open to us. God is your Father. He cares for you. He loves us in Christ. And he hears you. Let's not box up our joy and put it into storage as we go through the motions waiting for the next holy day. But let us consider with great excitement, with great joy, and with daily wonder what God does for us in Christ. Jesus, the Christ, stepped into our human existence to save us. He reaches into our lives with his word and sacraments and he brings joy and power and comfort for each day that we walk through this world of sin and pain. Through faith in Christ, created by the Spirit's power through baptism and the word, you are God's child. You are loved. And this is made so clear to you through Word and Sacrament.

This is the buzz-worthy and victorious news that you can consider each day. Take notice. Look and listen with daily joy. God sent his Son to gather you to himself. God sent his Son to open heaven for you. Amen.