

Old Testament: Genesis 1: 1 - 5  
New Testament: Mark 1: 4 - 11

Let us pray. And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

What indeed is this baptism? For generations, thousands of years, since the beginnings of what we now know as Christianity, pastors, scholars and lay people have argued over baptism. When is it appropriate? For whom is it appropriate? What is the effect of baptism? Is baptism, in effect, synonymous with salvation? The only part of baptism that has not seemed to have created any kind of conflict among people is whether or not it is, in some sense of the word, necessary. To which, my impression is that most everyone would agree that it is necessary though the “why” would simply create more argumentation. And these types of arguments have led to denominational splits and various offshoots and the myriad of denominations, and non-demoninations, we currently find ourselves in the milieu of. So today, as we remember and celebrate the baptism of Jesus, we both take a moment to remember and celebrate our own baptism and to have a chat about what our baptism is about; remembering that what I present is my own belief and understanding based on biblical and theological historical research.

We start with Genesis intentionally. It was almost exactly a year ago today when I preached a sermon on God being the God of order who overcomes chaos; that God is not about chaos and disruption but that God brings order and calm. We see this narrative presented throughout the Bible and it starts right at the beginning. We see “the deep” as representative of the primordial waters and understand them as chaotic because just before we are told that the earth was without form and void and darkness ruled. Without God to provide structure and order, the waters simply exist and swirl in unending chaotic disruption. And, I would add, that this even seems to me to remain true today. We seem to have further advanced our understanding and knowledge of space and the universe than we have of the depths of the seas. And so we see God bringing order and structure to the chaotic primordial waters. To master what seems beyond being mastered reveals the strength and majesty of God who can. Similarly, this is why we see Jesus turning water into wine, calming the storm on the Galilean Sea and walking on water. God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has mastery and authority over that which seems unmasterable. Therefore, using water as representative of our relationship with God, reflects our submission to God’s mastery and authority over that same substance which we have submitted ourselves to. Our willingness to humble ourselves to the authority of God is reflected in our baptism.

We see this willingness to humble ourselves to the authority of God in baptism reflected in our reading from Mark. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. A turning away from Sin and a turning towards God. Jesus' baptism is a baptism of reunion and reunification. A sealing of, a guarantee marker of, God's promise to do precisely these things; reunite and reunity. It does not seem that Jesus needs John's baptism because Jesus is God. Jesus is also fully human. Jesus enters into submission to the authority of God the Father with his baptism by John. And the result? God's *declaration* that Jesus is his beloved Son, capital S, with whom God is well pleased. Was Jesus already God's beloved Son with whom God was well pleased even before his baptism? Before this declaration occurred? I should see head's nodding affirmatively. Yes, of course Jesus was already God's beloved Son with whom God was, and still is, well pleased. Jesus' baptism did not "save" him. It marked him; it became a symbol; it became an outward reflection of an inward reality. Therefore, it does the same for us. God as Creator God means that the inward reality is that we are well sons and daughters of God; that all people everywhere are sons and daughters of God. The acceptance of baptism is the acceptance of God's authority over our lives; over our deaths; over our salvation. It is not salvation in and of itself.

Our Jewish forebears also had an outward sign of an inward reality. Their submission to the authority of I Am Who I Am was reflected in their ritual circumcision. Jesus himself was circumcised as the Law instructed. He established new signs of the covenant between God and God's created sons and daughters; baptism and the communion meal. It took a bit for good Jewish boys like Peter and Paul and the rest of the apostles to jump onboard and be OK with baptism instead of circumcision, but they did. And that is to our benefit! Most men get a bit squeamish at the idea of circumcision and no women can be circumcised and so baptism is a more inclusive practice. Men and women, all people, are beloved sons and daughters, beloved people, of God. Baptism is the outward sign of that inward reality.

That's what this baptism is. It does not effect salvation. Jesus' resurrection does that. This baptism humbles us. It reminds us that we are not our own. That we are a part of something far bigger than ourselves. That we cannot get through this life only living for, or looking out for, our own selves only. Even if you were baptized as a baby and have no recollection of your baptism, that does not change the inward reality that you are a beloved child of God; as is everyone else. Always have been, always will be. Your baptism is an acknowledgement of that and a reminder of your submission, or your need to submit, to the authority of God. Remember your baptism and live into it this day and every day. Amen.