

The Risk After Christmas

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Christmas is over, and the Wise Men have come and gone. Now that the decorations have been put away, there is a risk that we put it ALL away. We have attended special services. We have visited with family. We have gone to other churches, and we have brought relatives to worship with us. But today, the risk is that we are going to put it all away in storage for another year, and if that is really the case, then what did Jesus come for?

Thirty years had passed in our Gospel readings, between the Christmas readings and the Gospel text for today. And maybe that is a good thing that the church fast-forwards the readings to the Jordan river. While John would have built his ministry up over time—and he must have baptized many people—today, we are fast-forwarding his ministry to a unique and special event, because it was a baptism like no other. This baptism laid the groundwork for our own baptism.

But before I continue, let me ask you: So, how is Jesus doing? With all that He has done, given where He stood, and all that He has given, this might be an important question to ask ourselves from time to time. Each of us should have vested interest—an eternal vested interest. After all, the angels who proclaimed Jesus' birth said, "Peace on earth, good will toward men." That means all of us. And given that the season of Epiphany began last Thursday, God makes it clear to us in His Word, that He is not necessarily pleased with us, but He certainly is with Jesus, which is a good thing for us because of what Jesus does for us in our text today.

Now, most likely, all sorts of people came to John for his baptism of repentance. Even the critics came out to see it. The Pharisees and Sadducees questioned why people needed to receive John's baptism instead of believing in the promise that was theirs through Abraham. Abraham lived by faith with repentance, and he trusted in God's promises. But, over time, the outcome of that faith, the faith of those who relied on Abraham's heritage, did not bring about the fruits of faith that God had expected: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

So, Jesus came. And He stood at the Jordan River. It spoke volumes, because He did not stand with the "brood of vipers." Instead, He stood with sinners who had come to be baptized by John. Jesus wanted to be baptized by John, but John said to Him, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" (Matthew 3:14). So, in reply, Jesus says, "Let it be so for now, for thus it is fulfilling for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). John's point was that, in and of Himself, Jesus had no need to be baptized. And yet, like many of us so often find in our lives, God often has other plans. He is the One, according to our reading, who sets the terms of Baptism. Because—thanks be to God—Jesus, God's only Son, came for people like you and me. And there, on the banks of the Jordan, He stands with sinners in order to go on to become the chief of all sinners on the cross and shoulder the burden of it all.

For Jesus, "fulfilling all righteousness" meant becoming the embodiment of all humanity and fulfilling God's Will, and then going to the very end where all sin-plagued humanity ends. His baptism was only the first step that would eventually lead Him to the cross, death, and the gates of Hell.

And yet, those Pharisees and the Sadducees who were there must have thought that Jesus was going down the wrong path, just like they would reassert to Jesus, time and time again over

the next three years, because He stood with all those who were being baptized.

But when He was baptized and came out of the water, the heavens opened up. The Spirit of God descended on Him like a dove. It rested upon Him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased.” Through those words, “My Son, whom I love” and “I am well pleased,” not only do we hear God the Father affirming Jesus as His Son whom He loves, but we hear Him affirming Jesus in what He has done: Jesus is the Anointed One. He is the Christ, the Anointed Messiah.

Now, if you had been standing there that day on the riverbank, it would be understandable that you might be awestruck, confused, and rather surprised. If you were paying attention, you might have seen the many people who had come to be baptized, and Jesus would have looked like many of them. And even though you might have known that the Messiah would come someday, you might not have known how extraordinary this baptism would turn out to be. Jesus looked like the many others who had come before Him. In fact, He even looked like many after His baptism. But when it comes to the things of God, it is always better to take what is given, trust in what God says, and hold on to that which you receive from Him. Because God is God and we are Not. And His ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9).

Those who stood on the banks of the Jordan that day and the early hearers and readers of this Gospel would have heard an overwhelming approval—the giving of the Holy Spirit and the voice from heaven—Jesus could not have gotten a better stamp of divine approval.

Taking His stance with sinners, Jesus took the first step on that path in reclaiming all who had wandered away, like the many

prodigal sons and daughters, who have followed their own selfishness desires. It brought about a new light of Epiphany for us all.

But the baptism that Jesus received is not the same as ours. It was only the first step along the path. It would not be finished on the day that Jesus was baptized, because there is still the cross, as well as the resurrection. Because unlike John's baptism, all of us are baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection. Luther called that a "happy exchange," what is Christ's would become ours. Through His death on the cross, He took all our sins upon Himself and died with them, that we might receive His Righteousness through baptism.

That is why when someone is baptized, they receive a white cloth representing Christ's purity that covers all their sin. And they also receive a lit candle, that they might receive His light and carry it out into the world, a world still darkened by sin, that others might come to know of His light and love for them as well.

Now that Christmas is over, the Wise Men have come and gone, and the decorations have been put away, there is a risk of putting the purpose of it all away in storage for another year. But if that is really the case, what did Jesus come for? He came for all people. And for that to happen all righteousness needs to be fulfilled.

All righteousness is fulfilled, not only through Jesus' baptism, but ours as well. Being baptized into His death and resurrection, not only do we receive the forgiveness of sins, but in this faith that has been planted within us, that by His Spirit, we might become sons and daughters in the Kingdom of God, in order that we too might do His will on this earth, sharing the Good News of salvation to all people.

In Jesus Name, Amen.