

Sermon Mark 1:1-11

*May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

In Advent we heard of John the Baptist, Rough. Weather-worn. Wearing camel's hair. Certainly not urbane. How he was in the Judean wilderness outside of Jerusalem, and that he was proclaiming the way of the Lord, and baptizing the people for the repentance of sins. In today's Gospel, we go down by the river. We see a man. We see a large group of people. Mark writes that the whole Judean countryside was there..

Mark writes that not only were the Judeans there, but also "all of Jerusalem" was coming out there too. All kinds of people were there: Farming people, country people, Merchants, laborers, and craftsmen. Men, women, and children. But also the priests and the Levites, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Zealots. Yes, all of Jerusalem was coming there. this was some kind of an event.

What was happening? A call to baptism for the repentance of sins. This wild man, this prophet, was saying new things, "prepare ye the way of the Lord." But baptism was not new. Yes, this baptism, "for the repentance of sins," was different. But baptism itself was not new. As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

You will recall how the Jews were commanded to avoid all uncleanness. And part of that was washing, or baptism, for purification. One had to wash, or to be baptized, to enter the temple area. The priests in particular had to be baptized before they could enter the temple. And baptism was part of everyday life. Pots and pans had to be baptized before using them. And so it is that in the account of Christ's miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding of Cana, there were large stone jars of water, for the washing, or baptizing, of pots according the law of purification.

It was not an entirely new concept to the people that washing or baptizing would have a religious or spiritual meaning. So they received from John a baptism for the repentance of sins.

Like the people of Judea and Jerusalem, we, too, have received a baptism with spiritual significance. A baptism for the remission of sins. John himself says that he does not have the last word; he is not the final authority on baptism. He says, "After me comes He who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

And so it is that this greater one, this one whose sandal's John was not worthy to untie, arrives at the Jordan river. And He was baptized by John.

Now, why was Jesus baptized? We know that John was baptizing for the repentance of sins, and that we have been baptized for the remission of sins.

But this is Jesus. He has no sins. Why then get baptized? We don't wash a pot that is already clean. Was He baptized to cleanse Him of sins?

In our Gospel, we see that the people are baptized for the repentance of sin, and that they confessed their sin. They "were being baptized by [John] in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.". But the baptism of Jesus was not a baptism for repentance of His sins. He had no sins to confess, no sins to repent of. Again, why was Christ baptized?

Well, by His baptism, Christ united Himself to baptism, so that, in and through baptism we should be united with Him. Let me repeat that. By His baptism, Christ united Himself to baptism, so that, in and through baptism, we should be united with Him.

In Romans, St. Paul writes: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, 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. For if we have been united with him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His."

Because Christ has united Himself to baptism, we in baptism are united to Him. And by this union, we have all the benefits of His grace and goodness towards us. Jesus Christ was baptized for the forgiveness of sins, but not for the forgiveness of His sins, but of our sins.

Had Christ not been baptized, then baptism would remain only a washing for purification. But now, baptism is not plain water only, but water comprehended and connected with the Word of God. And what, or Who, is the Word of God? Jesus Christ, our Lord. He is the very Word of God incarnate.

By His baptism Christ makes it His own, so that, in and through baptism, we are not merely purified. Nor are we baptized into forgiveness in an abstract, spiritual, wishful way. We are baptized into our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ Himself.

In Advent, as we were preparing for the coming of Christ, it was John who made the announcement, - who said that the Lord was coming. Now, however, Christ has arrived, and it is the Father who is speaking, "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In baptism we are made sons and daughters of God, heirs according to His promises. So we are His beloved children, in whom He is well pleased. You are God's beloved, because you are united with Christ.

But even as we are united by baptism with His death, we are united by baptism with His resurrection. He triumphed over the shame of the cross. In baptism, we know that we too shall triumph. For the life that we live, we live in Christ.

When that day shall come, and death stares us in the face, we know that we have victory over death. Because in baptism, we, and all believers are united to Christ in His resurrection.

Yes, we are united with Our King, our Lord and Savior. Christ lives in us, He rules over us. He guards us, He guides us, and He protects us.

For in baptism, we are joined together with Jesus forever.

Praise be to God.

Amen.

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