

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. You may be seated.

So today, we celebrate not only Luca's baptism, but Jesus' baptism as well. So, it's a wonderful reminder of what it is that we celebrate.

Now, Jesus comes to John, and this is the beginning of his public ministry. So, he's just about ready to go forth into the world and proclaim the message of God. And he goes to be baptized in the Jordan by John. And John, of course, looks at Jesus, confused, because what does Jesus need to be baptized for? The rest of us, we have sinned. We have inherited original sin from Adam and Eve. We've committed sin for the rest of our lives. We need baptism to forgive us, to redeem us, to make us part of the family of God.

But Jesus is already the Son of God. He was born without original sin. He lived a perfect life. What in the world did he have to be baptized for? And that's what John is thinking, and going, "This doesn't make any sense. I need to be baptized by you, not the other way around. I mean, after all, you're the Son of God." John already has proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, that has come to take away the sin of the world." And now he's coming to submit to John's baptism. What is going on?

What's going on is... We've been studying, in our Bible study, in Exodus, about the Passover and then the actual Exodus itself, passing through the Red Sea and walking in the wilderness, getting ready to go to Mount Sinai for the 10 commandments. And we connected that with Jesus, who also was sent down to Egypt, after the Wise Men went to visit him and Herod came to kill him. So they went down to Egypt. And the scriptures say, "Out of Egypt I have called my son," talking about prophecy of bringing Jesus out of Egypt.

Well, what Jesus is doing is he's literally walking in the footsteps of the Israelites and replacing their footsteps with his. The Israelites, if you've ever been to one of my classes or you've heard me preach on them, their favorite activity to do was to grumble against God. They see the signs and wonders in heaven. They get out. They pass through the Red Sea. They get on the other side of the Red Sea. A day or two later, they're kind of hungry, and they're thirsty. And what do they do? "God, you brought me out in the wilderness to die." Really? Saved you, passed you through the waters, given you all these wonderful things, and you're still complaining that I'm not doing enough for you. Israel favorite pastime was to grumble against God. "What have you done for me lately? Yeah, I know what you did yesterday, but what about today?"

Now, as sad as it might seem, we're not a whole lot different. Let's face it. How often do we forget the grace and mercy of God? How often do we forget God's benefits and when something problematic happens or something we don't like, we

say, "God, why me?" As if he hasn't already provided for us day by day, hour by hour. So, Jesus erases the footsteps of grumbling and complaining Israel and replaces them with his perfect life, almost literally by walking through the sand to Egypt, but definitely spiritually replacing the fallen and imperfect Israel with his perfect life.

And he's doing the same thing here in the waters of baptism with the Jordan. In essence, he is sanctifying all of those waters, so that when we are baptized, as Luca was this morning, the waters that we use spiritually are connected and connected with the waters that Christ was baptized into. And not only that, the sin, our sin, is taken through that water and placed upon Christ. Before we were born, we'd already died in Christ on the cross, because that's what Paul is trying to communicate to us. Should we commit more sin, that grace may abound? By no means, of course not. But how can we, who died to sin, still live in it? How did we die to sin? Was it by something we did or by something that was done to us?

And Paul makes it very clear. We died to sin, because in our baptism, we were connected to the death of Christ. His death is our benefit. We receive the benefit of that death, because in our baptismal waters, the sin of us was placed upon Christ. He walked into those waters in the Jordan and, in a sense, sort of sucked up the sins of all of humanity, of all of history, and all of the future. And he began to spiritually replace our sinful life with his perfect life, so that when he goes to the cross, our sins go with him and they are crucified there. And we are freed from the guilt of our sin if we believe in him, if we trust him, if we remember that he adopted us in our baptism. And so, we have died to sin.

I find it interesting, if you were listening to the first hymn, verse five ends this way: Your baptism stands and makes you whole, and then, in death, completes you. In your death, your baptism completes you and brings you to Christ, brings you to the promised land, where you will dwell with God for all eternity. Your baptism completes you, brings you into the family of God, adopts you, and marks you.

Now, if you notice, the hymn that we sang just before the sermon was from Advent, On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry, because Advent also is reminding us of what we have to look forward to. Advent is looking forward to the coming of the King, not just on Christmas day, but his second coming. And why do we look forward to the coming of Christ? Because we are baptized, because we were brought into the family, because we were connected with the death of Christ in our baptism. And if we are connected in a death like his, how much more in a resurrection like his? And so, that is the confidence and the hope that we have in baptism.

And just to make sure that we know this is indeed from God, when Jesus is baptized, the heavens open up and a spirit descends upon him in the form of a dove, and the voice says, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Now, listen to what he says in Isaiah through the prophet Isaiah. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights." This is my beloved Son, in whom I'm well pleased, in whom my soul delights. Isaiah is giving us the sign that Jesus Christ is indeed this one.

And then the next line, "I've put my spirit upon him." Jesus being baptized is a fulfillment of what Isaiah is talking about right here. And the former things are gone through Christ and new things are delivered: forgiveness of sins, life everlasting, hope, and comfort. And especially this, a bruised reed he will not break and a faintly burning wick he will not quench. So, we have hope.

In our lives, sometimes it feels like we're pretty bruised and broken. In our lives, sometimes it feels like the flame of our life is just flickering. We're so beat down. We're so tired. We're so frustrated. We're so discouraged. It feels like we got nothing left. And we may feel like this bruised reed or this smoldering wick. But what God says is, he will not break it and he will not quench it. In fact, he will guard it and protect it, and keep it in his loving care, and mend it, and bring it back to life.

So, if you are feeling like a bruised reed or a faintly burning wick, turn to your baptism. Remember that God has adopted you and made you his own, and find the strength that comes from him, because when we are weak, he is strong. And if you know family members or friends, who don't seem to be living a life of God, who seem to be barely in the house, pray that God might bring people into their lives, that they might know, that although they are bruised and smoldering, that God still loves them as well and that he might bring them back to the family.

In the meantime, let us serve God in our vocations, praising him for the gift of life that he has given to us, confident that we have died already in Christ, and so, therefore, our life is not our own, but his. And serve him. Be a witness wherever you might be, in whatever you do. Even when you're bruised, even when you're battered down, even when the people that you are with seem to be against you and against God, you are called to be faithful and walk in his footsteps, as he walked in Israel's, trusting that he will work with you. Pray that you might have the words to speak to those who are against God. Pray that you might be able to act in accordance with his will, because you are dead to sin. And if you are dead to sin, then you are called to walk in newness of life.

You are called to live his life in this world, to be the hands and the feet of the grace of God to those around you. Seek his will. Pray for his guidance. Trust him all the days of your life. And when you are weak, when you are battered, when you are

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broken, when life seems hopeless, know this: you are baptized. You are a child of God, and God never leaves nor forsakes his children. May his grace and his mercy and his peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.