

Epiphany II

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[0 : 00] Although I have focused our sermons on the epistle readings throughout this past liturgical year, I want to take a little time to discuss the baptism of Jesus heard in our gospel reading from Mark chapter 1.

We will then jump into how the baptism of our Lord connects with our epistle reading here in Romans chapter 12, verses 6 through 16. The baptism of Jesus is absolutely vital. It's vital in understanding the scope and the depth of our Lord's ministry because it speaks to our redemption. As a matter of fact, the reading of Jesus' baptism is what kicks off the season of epiphany for our Eastern Orthodox brothers and sisters.

It's a high feast day. The reason it is so important is because it is the manifestation of the Holy Trinity, often called theophany, the revelation of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And it also begins our Lord's ministry as he is now prepared to journey and make his way to Jerusalem. That is, to the cross.

[1 : 26] Furthermore, it speaks in a deeply profound way of why our Lord came to this earth. You see, Jesus came to bring about a new exodus.

He came to bring about a new creation. He came to deliver us from the destructive power of sin. Therefore, his baptism in the Jordan River and his ascent from these waters speak of the redemption he came to bring.

Jesus came to restore our fallen humanity. God took upon flesh to restore our fallen humanity by destroying death once and for all.

Our Lord came to deliver us from the depths and tyranny of sin, death, and the devil. And to create a new people, a new Israel, which we heard from Zechariah chapter 8, from all nations, from all backgrounds, that would now be made children of God by way of being adopted and incorporated into him to become his body.

Baptism is the physical means or the physical instrument that God uses in order to destroy the sin in us and to birth us as newly formed children made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit.

[3 : 01] Maybe a better way of explaining this is by reading what is often called the flood prayer of Martin Luther, which, by the way, was in the original 1549 Book of Common Prayer.

And I will go on record and say this prayer should have never been taken out of our prayer books. But modernism was alive and very, alive and well, very early on, before the 1970s.

That's a topic for another time. Listen as I read a portion of this prayer. Almighty and eternal God, according to your strict judgment, you condemned the unbelieving world through the flood.

Yet according to your great mercy, you preserved believing Noah and his family, eight souls in all. You drowned hard-hearted Pharaoh and all his hosts in the Red Sea, yet led your people Israel through the water on dry ground, prefiguring this washing of your holy baptism.

Through the baptism in the Jordan of your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, you sanctified and instituted all waters to be a blessed flood and a lavish washing away of sin.

[4 : 26] Luther continues in this prayer by saying, Grant that he or she, that is the one being baptized, be kept safe and secure in the holy ark of Christ's church, being separated from the multitude of unbelievers and serving your name at all times with a fervent spirit and a joyful hope, so that with all believers in your promise, he or she would be declared worthy of eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

In other words, Jesus came out of those destructive waters that destroyed the world during the evil days of Noah, that drowned Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and he has come out of this water now bringing forth deliverance, not judgment.

And the water that once took life is now an instrument of life. Just as the cross that brought death was an execution chamber, now brings hope for the entire world, the only hope.

God uses his creation, dear friends. He uses the physical stuff, the matter of this world, in order to bring forth a new creation.

Jesus has sanctified water that is connected to his holy name. Water that's connected to that name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to now be a means of life and salvation.

[6 : 11] And this understanding of baptism, by the way, was never really challenged for around the first 1,500 years of the church's life. But the question is, what now?

Have we been baptized so that we can now have our fire, or in this case, flood insurance, and can live however we want? We're in the ark, everything's fine.

Obviously, such an idea is absolutely absurd, but I'm afraid that is what is happening in so many churches today. Baptism has become nothing more than a cute little ceremony where we dress the baby up and then we go on our merry way.

St. Paul tells Christians who have been incorporated into Christ what they are to do as baptized children of the living God. You see, even though the Israelites were saved by passing through the Red Sea unharmed, while Pharaoh and the Egyptians perished, being overtaken by that destructive force of water, those same Hebrew people, what happened to them?

They died in the wilderness. They never saw the promised land. Why? Because of their rebellion. Because of their defiance of their God.

[7 : 41] That is a warning for all of us. And it's a warning that St. Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians chapter 10. Friends, we belong to God.

We have been rescued from death by God. We have been delivered. We have been washed. We have been sanctified by God.

And that is why St. Paul tells these Christians in Rome and all of us that now we are to live out this life that we have received being incorporated into Christ.

We have put on Christ. Now we are to live out this love that we have received in Jesus. And that's why St. Paul says in Romans chapter 12, which we heard beginning here at verse 9, let love be without hypocrisy.

Be kind. Abhor what is evil. Abhor what is evil. Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good.

[8 : 49] Be kindly, affectionate to one another with brotherly love. In honor, giving preference to one another. Bless those who persecute you.

Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another.

And do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble or the lowly. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

Amen. I encourage you to go home maybe after we're finished here and read the Magnificat and you'll see this in action by our Blessed Mother.

Friends, the one who abhors evil is the one who seeks to run from evil, not flirt with wickedness. The word for evil here comes from the Greek word apostasis, which is where we get the word apostate.

[10 : 16] St. Paul says, run away, have nothing to do with evil as you would an apostate. That is one who has not only abandoned the faith, but one who has become an enemy of God.

Instead, St. Paul says, we are to cling to what is good, be kind, serve the Lord with diligence while rejoicing in the hope we have been given, even as we go through the trials and the tribulations of life.

St. Paul says, continue to be steadfast in prayer. Say your daily prayers and pray for one another and pray throughout the day.

Be the opposite of selfishness by practicing hospitality. It means get out of our comfort zone and invest in other people. Giving to others in order to edify the saints.

St. Paul says, don't name drop. Don't speak of how important you think you are. Instead, associate with the lowly, not the exalted, showing deference or favoritism to the rich.

[11 : 28] St. James talks about that in his epistle very bluntly. St. Paul says here in verse 16 of Romans chapter 12, do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble.

And do not be wise in your own opinion. Wow. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Man, do we need to hear that today, right?

Why does St. Paul go to such lengths in describing the way we should live? Why does he talk about living out this life of love so emphatically?

Well, it's very easy. It's because even though we have been adopted into the family of God, being baptized into Christ Jesus, we all, all of us, are like the Israelites.

We covet what the Egyptians have. We want to be well-fed, well-dressed. We want to be well thought of by the world.

[12 : 37] We are often willing to exchange our sinless baptismal garments that we have received in Christ, being clothed in Christ for the world's rags.

And what happens is we tune out to God and we become callous more and more and more to his word.

And we turn ourselves off to the needs of others. A very blunt way of saying this is that we are all prone to be absorbed with ourselves.

What St. Paul is telling us this morning is that we who have been incorporated into Christ, who have put on Christ, we are now to walk according to his ways.

That is true freedom. To do the opposite is actually to go back into slavery. We have been given a new name.

[13 : 37] We've been given a new identity in holy baptism. And we are a new creation in Christ Jesus. We belong to a new king. We have a new country.

Yes, we have a new country. Which is called the church. The blessed communion of saints and the kingdom of God. And our lives are to be devoted to this new life.

Filled with joy. Even in the midst of the trials. Even in the midst of the tribulations. Because in baptism. In baptism.

Don't miss this. We share in that eternal. Eternal love. Between the father, the son, and the holy spirit.

We now participate in that love. In baptism. We enter into that. And we are changed. Not just outwardly.

[14 : 35] We are changed internally. By God. And we are called to seek to live out this love. And this hope. In a world filled with darkness.

Our calling as baptized Christians. Is to shine the light of God's glory. To shine the light of his truth. To this world. Not by going around. Always spouting off our opinions.

But by living a life of love. And devotion to him. To God. Devotion to the one who has cleansed us. Delivered us. Washed us. So that we can turn around. And serve others. In love. Amen.

In the name of the father. And of the son. Of the holy ghost. Amen.