

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Baptism of our Lord, January 13, 2008

2<sup>nd</sup> Baptist Church, Lincoln, NE, Robert C. Molby, Interim Pastor

**REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM**  
Isaiah 42:1-9; Matthew 3:13-17

**Prayer of Illumination:**

Creator Spirit, who hovered over the waters at creation's birth, who descended in the form of a dove at Jesus' baptism, who was poured out under the signs of fire and wind at Pentecost: Come to us, open our hearts and minds, so that we may hear the Word of life and be renewed by your power, for you live and reign with the Father and the Son, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Isaiah 42:1-9** (The Servant, a Light to the Nations)

<sup>1)</sup> Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

<sup>2)</sup> He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;

<sup>3)</sup> a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.

<sup>4)</sup> He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

<sup>5)</sup> Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it;

<sup>6)</sup> I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the peoples, a light to the nations,

<sup>7)</sup> to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison whose doors are shut, whose doors are iron, whose bars are bronze.

<sup>8)</sup> I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.

<sup>9)</sup> See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

**Matthew 3:13-17** (The Baptism of Jesus)

<sup>13)</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. <sup>14)</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and lo you come to me?" <sup>15)</sup> But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. <sup>16)</sup> And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17)</sup> And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Why were you baptized? Or maybe some of you have not been baptized. That's OK for in the course of this sermon you might start thinking about reasons to be baptized. But for those who have been baptized, the question: "Why were you baptized?"

Your first answer might be: "In order to become a member of the church." I cannot think of a church that does not require baptism in order to join it, so, regardless of the name of the church or the denomination, whether they baptize by immersion as we do or by sprinkling or pouring, baptism is required in order to become a member. So, if you want to join the church you are asked to be baptized.

Another answer might be, "Because my parents expected me to be baptized or because my friends at that time were being baptized and I wanted to be a part of it."

A third answer might be: "Because I have become a Christian. In my heart I have accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior and I want to follow him. The first step in following Him is to follow Him in baptism. And so I want to be baptized."

But let's ask the question in a different way, "Why was Jesus baptized?" He was not baptized in order to join a church because there were no churches in his day. Verse 13 says that Jesus specifically came from Galilee in order to be baptized by John. Jesus traveled on foot from Galilee to the Jordan River in Judea in order to be baptized by John. One could project the thought that he could have had someone else baptize him in the upper part of the Lake Galilee or, perhaps even better—he could have baptized himself. Now we have two questions: "Why was Jesus baptized?" and "Why did he want John to do it?" I'm not sure I can give a clear answer but I will offer a suggestion or two!

Matthew is the only one who records this intimate conversation between Jesus and John.

<sup>14)</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" <sup>15)</sup> But Jesus answered him, "**Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.**" Then he consented.

None of the other Gospels record this conversation between Jesus and John. John's gospel does not mention Jesus' baptism. Mark and Luke point out that Jesus was baptized by John but they do not say anything about this conversation. Matthew is the only one.

Here are some thoughts about why Jesus was baptized and perhaps why He wanted John to do it. Three reasons (and they come from the Interpreter's Bible Commentary on Matthew) (None of these have all the truth in them but each of them may have some of the truth; altogether they may help us understand why Jesus was baptized and why he went to John):

1. Jesus was renouncing the sheltered life of home. He had decided to embark on the dangerous mission to which he had been called. At the moment of baptism he took up the Cross that he would carry all his life and in the end, upon which he died. He left home to become a homeless man who had not where to lay his head.
2. Jesus took upon himself the common sin of mankind. He was sinless, so we believe; he did not have to be baptized because he was a sinner. But we are sinners—humankind is sinful; so he identified with the sinfulness of humankind by being baptized. He was sinless but he did not hold himself aloof from the world's sin. He was truly righteous but righteousness without love is not righteous. Jesus took on the sin of humankind not in order to become a party to sin but to share the shame and pain of sin. He absorbed the sin into his own love in order to redeem sinners. He repented *with* us to redeem us in God.
3. Here is the 3<sup>rd</sup> reason, Jesus sought to be baptized. It was because he knew that God had a commission to place upon him and because he believed that the voice of God might be heard in some divine way through the ministry of his brave cousin, John, who was much disciplined in righteousness.

And, in the eyes of Matthew, Jesus **was** commissioned at his baptism. He saw the heavens open and the Spirit of God, like a dove—please note, not really a dove but like a dove, or a bird—and light on him. Please note, Jesus saw the heavens opened and the Spirit of God like a dove, not the bystanders—just Jesus. It was something between Jesus and God—it was God placing his hands on him, ordaining him to the mission to which He had called him, to redeem and bring salvation to all humankind. Then a voice, **heard by all**, said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” Jesus saw the heavens opened. Jesus saw the Spirit descend, like a dove or a bird, and alight upon him. Everyone heard the voice saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” The words “Beloved Son” can be paraphrased, “Chosen One!” When the voice was heard the seal was set. Jesus had been chosen. God laid his own hands upon Jesus and ordained Him to be the Savior and Lord of all! Talk about a commissioning service—this was a commissioning above all commissions!

I urge you who are baptized to think upon your own baptism experience. Recall where it was you were baptized, what was the name of the minister who performed the baptism, what church was it in. Was it by immersion or sprinkling? Who was there and witnessed your baptism? What did that moment mean to you?

While serving the Presbyterian Church USA as an Interim Pastor I was caused to think even more upon my baptism but perhaps not in the way you are thinking. I noted in the ceremony of infant baptism the parents and others were asked to remember their own baptism, the vows they had taken and remind themselves what it meant. I noted at the time of confirmation when a person decided to become an active member of the church they were asked to again think on their baptism, the vows they had taken and what they

meant. At the time of marriage each person was asked to think upon their baptism, the vows they had taken and what they meant and at the time of a funeral service we were reminded of Romans 6:3-5:

When we were baptized in Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. For if we have been united with Christ in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

From birth to death we were reminded of our baptism. Baptism reminds us to whom we belong and whom we serve. We serve not ourselves but Christ Jesus our Lord and we belong to God. Baptism can remind us that we have been commissioned by God for service.

I carry in my pocket a little stone. It reminds me of my baptism. When I took my training to do Interim Ministry work our final service was one of remembering our baptism. There was a shallow bowl of water placed at the front of the place of worship. In that shallow bowl were many small stones of various sizes and shapes. We were asked to think on our own baptism, go forward when we were ready, touch the water with our finger, and, if we desired, to take a stone from that water to remind us of our baptism. This is the little stone I took that day. Whenever I touch it, I am reminded of that occasion and to whom I belong and who I strive to serve.

### **Profession of Faith**

**The congregation may stand, as the minister continues:**

Sisters and brothers in Christ, our baptism is the sign and seal of our cleansing from sin, and of our being grafted into Christ. Through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the power of sin was broken and God's kingdom entered our world. Through our baptism we were made citizens of God's kingdom, and freed from the bondage of sin. Let us celebrate that freedom and redemption through the renewal of the promises made at our baptism. If you have not yet accepted Christ Jesus as your Savior and Lord, followed him in baptism, you may wish to also participate in giving your affirmations of these vows. You may become a Christian, a follower of Christ, by giving your "yes" in these questions and answers. I ask you, therefore—you who have done it before and you who may do it today—to reject sin, to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, and to confess the faith of the church, the faith in which we are baptized.

#### Renunciations

**The minister continues, using one of the following:**

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world? If so, answer, "I do."

**I do.**

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love? If so, answer, "I do."

**I do.**

Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love? If so, answer, "I will, with God's help."

**I will, with God's help.**

Turn in your hymnal to # 716, the Apostles Creed, and let us read it together:

Let's turn to hymn # 373, "Where He Leads Me I will follow," and sing verses 1 & 3. If you are here today and wish to be baptized and become a member of this church I invite you to come forward and make that desire known today. Or, if you have already been baptized in another church and wish to make this church your church home because this is where you are attending and you wish to be more active, we invite you to come forward and make that desire known. Of if you wish to pray with us over some concern, you come and we will pray with you.