

Sermon – Mark 1:4-11; Genesis 1:1-5

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Grace Lutheran Church

Baptism of Our Lord – Year B

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“Perks and Re-creation”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace this day in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. This past Friday morning began as most of our days begin, with one of our boys crawling into our bed in the predawn hours. In this instance, it was Torsten, our youngest. As usual, he brought his favorite stuffed animal with him, a well-worn, much-loved dog named Oshki. But it turned out that Friday wasn't just another day, for while his mother and I continued our quest for sleep, Torsten announced that it was Oshki's birthday. As you may have noticed on Facebook, we ran with the idea. Erika baked a caked; we – adults, children, and other esteemed stuffed animal friends – gathered to sing “Happy Birthday”; Torsten even wrapped up some presents to give to his dog. Yes, we did all of this for a stuffed animal. And even I find myself asking why. Well, two answer spring to mind. First, it's cold out! We had to do something to pass the time. And second, it wasn't really about Oshki. We don't care about the dog for the dog's sake. But we do love Torsten – a beloved son with whom we are well pleased, and so for Torsten's sake we're willing to indulge his imaginative love for Oshki. Theologically speaking, Oshki was the beneficiary of imputed righteousness. Also, we got to eat cake.
2. Today we celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord, when Jesus went down, like so many others, to the river Jordan to be baptized by his cousin, John. John had just declared himself unworthy to untie the sandals of the One who is to come, and yet Jesus comes to be baptized. Why? Does Jesus need the forgiveness of sins and the call to repentance that John's baptism gives? Does

Jesus need the gift of the Holy Spirit and the promises of life that are bestowed upon us when we are baptized? Well, of course not. So why does Jesus go down to the Jordan? Simple ritual or foreshadowing? I don't think so. The key to Jesus' baptism is in the words that Jesus hears when the heavens are torn open and the Spirit descends upon him: "You, Jesus, are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

3. Mark begins his account of the gospel of Jesus not with Jesus' birth, but with John's cry in the wilderness. The story begins where we are, in the wild, and when Jesus enters the scene, this is where he meets us: in the churning chaos of the waters. Jesus isn't baptized for repentance or forgiveness or new life. Jesus, here at the start of his ministry, is baptized *into our need* – into the chaos that swirls around us, the sin and death that seek to pull us under the water. Jesus is baptized into our need in order to open up the divine life of God to our plight, that we might begin to see the means of our salvation. So we note today that when Jesus is baptized, he doesn't hear: "All the people of the world are my children and I'm pleased with them. They're doing just great." No, the voice speaks of the pleasure and joy that the Father finds in the Son. It will only be for Jesus' sake that you and I will find redemption, salvation, and life.
  
4. In his incarnation into our flesh *and* his baptism into our need, Jesus has taken a stand of solidarity with us, that God would turn to us for Jesus' sake and grant us his righteousness. Or more simply, God loves us because the Father loves the Son, and the Son has taken his stand with and for us. Baptized into our need, Jesus will die our death and be raised to new life that we might be gifted with the benefits of faith. What this means is that the gospel is something very different from a banal statement that God loves us all unconditionally, just the way we are. No, it is far more, far better, than that. We *have* failed to live up to God's call; we *have* fallen into sin; we *have* not met the conditions – but God's love for us is so great that in Jesus, God

has become one of us, has lived and died for us, has pleased God with his obedience and faith to the point that his life and righteousness are given, gifted, promised to us. The party is not thrown for our sake, but for Jesus' sake; we're invited along because Jesus' gifts are granted, imputed, to us. As the reformer Philip Melanchthon wrote, "to know Christ is to know his benefits." Because of the Father's love for the Son – and for no other reason – we have entered into God's reign of love.

5. As we find the benefits of Christ flowing to us in faith, we are not left as we were. No, again, God loves us too much to say that we're good enough and leave it at that. Instead, as God's Spirit brooded over the chaotic waters in the beginning as the divine, creative voice brought forth order, purpose, and life, so now has God in Christ entered into the chaos we have created, into the currents of sin and death, that the Spirit might work newness of life in us as we are re-created in the name of the One who is himself the new creation, Jesus Christ our Lord. It really is all about him, and it begins with his baptism that leads to our own. When we go down into the waters, it is so that they might swallow up our dead lives and bring forth new life in which death has no power any longer. You have been baptized, and for Jesus' sake, you are a daughter or son with whom God is well pleased.
  
6. In this re-creation, we are shown the lengths to which God will go to save us, becoming one of us, being baptized into our need, tearing open the very heavens to get to us. Such is the love of the Father for the Son, a love that has no bounds and into which we are welcomed through life-giving waters. And this is good news. After all, even our best human loves have their limits. On Saturday morning, Torsten crawled into our bed and told us that it was Monroe the Monkey's birthday. We rolled over and ignored him. I mean, *come on*. But God's love knows no such boundaries. The Father loves the Son, and in faith the crucified and risen life of the Son is yours. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep you hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.