

Baptism of our Lord-January 9, 2022

Baltic and East Nidaros Parish

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

"Heaven was Opened for You"

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

It has happened to me just a couple of times since I was ordained. Each time it happened it was usually a young person who hasn't seen me very often that would look at me dressed in my alb and whisper to their parents, "Is that Jesus?" I remember this happened several times to one of my former pastors Earl Johnson. He stood much taller than me and to no surprise appeared more divine than me. I saw several times when a young person pointed to him and thought he was Jesus. As a pastor whose calling is to preach about your Savior, Jesus Christ, there is a temptation to bask in the moment when you have been mistaken for Jesus.

This was happening to John the Baptist when the crowds were coming out to him to be baptized. They heard and believed that the Messiah would be different from anyone else and clearly John the Baptist was more different in his appearance, mannerisms, and speech from anyone else they had seen or heard. John was never tempted to spend any time taking pleasure that people were confusing him with Jesus. John didn't even mention to the people the similarities between him and Jesus. He could have told them that he and Jesus were related to each other and maybe there was some resemblance causing the confusion. He could have brought up that each of them came from miraculous pregnancies since John's mother didn't conceive any children until she was old, and Jesus' was born of a virgin. John could have told the people that both he and Jesus preached the same message of repentance so even their sermons would have sounded similar. But as many similarities that there were between John and Jesus, John never let the spotlight shine on him. Not even for the briefest moment of glory.

Instead, John quickly told everyone that he was nothing when compared to Jesus. The lowest of jobs of that day that came to John's mind was that of a servant who took off the sandals of smelly dirty feet to wash them. John told the people that he was lower than that and the baptisms that they were receiving from him were also different from the baptisms that would be done by Jesus.

To further illustrate the differences between the baptisms of John and Jesus, John uses an illustration that the people who lived off the land, the farmers of that day would understand. The baptism that John was doing was like doing a poor job of harvesting. It wasn't complete. The threshing floor wasn't cleared completely in the baptisms done by John. The grain may have been trampled on the threshing floor, but the separation of the grain from the chaff was not perfect. If there wasn't enough wind the chaff would fall back to the floor with the grain and if there was too much the grain would fly away with the chaff. As hard as the workers attempted to separate the chaff from the grain with their winnowing forks, the job of separating the chaff from the grain was never perfect. So it was with the baptisms that were done by John. John's baptisms were for the same purpose to remove sin, but his baptisms needed to be redone in an effort to remove more of the sins. John told the people that a baptism from Jesus would be with fire and the Holy Spirit and would only need to be done once.

There are other parables and illustrations that Jesus used so that his rural audiences would understand the point he was making. But do not confuse this illustration of wheat and chaff with the parable of the wheat and the weeds. The parable of the wheat and weeds is about two different plants that exist in the same field. The chaff in this illustration comes from the same plant. The chaff and the grain both come from the same place. The chaff is YOUR sin. Not the sin that you see by looking at other weeds. The sin that is removed is all yours.

Every stalk of wheat that reaches maturity will have grain and it will have chaff. But in the kingdom of heaven, there is no chaff. There is only grain.

It is quite interesting how Luke then goes on to describe the baptism of Jesus. Luke the gospel writer who is most noted for his extensive details, gives very few details regarding the baptism of Jesus. In fact, Luke sandwiches the baptism of Jesus between the baptism of the other people who were baptized by John and when the heavens were opened. But instead of dismissing this short description of the Baptism of Jesus, let's give that image another moment to settle in your minds. John emphasizes that Jesus was the connection between the other people who came to be baptized by John and the heavens being opened. So it is with your baptism.

*It is interesting to see the progression of technology regarding harvesters. I suspect that in Jesus' day, those that were making bread out of the wheat that was gathered would have to pick out pieces of broken beards or stalk or chaff as they were measuring out the flour. The threshing machine didn't have to wait for a windy day to better separate the grain from the chaff as it made its own wind and did a much better job of harvesting. And today the combines can be set with such precision there is **nearly** a perfect sample of grain after going through the combine.*

Heaven does not allow for the entrance of some nearly good people. Heaven is not included in the list of things where closeness matters like in horseshoes and hand grenades. Heaven is not for the pretty clean. Heaven is reserved for the spotless.

When Jesus came to the Jordan River to be baptized it was not to wash away his sins. When he entered the river, he had no sin that needed to be removed. But as John was bringing him up out of the water, Jesus began taking on the sins of the world including the people who had just been baptized. Jesus wasn't baptized for his sake. He was baptized for you and for me.

Luke didn't hear or didn't include what Jesus prayed for after he came up out of the water when he was baptized. And I guess it doesn't matter. What we do know is that Jesus saw the heavens opened and likely ended his prayer as we do and said, "Amen".

On this Baptism of the Lord Sunday, we remember that Jesus indeed was baptized. If that was all this day was about, this simply would be a historical day to remember and celebrate. But, as short and as lacking in detail surrounding what happened while Jesus was being baptized, it is clear that the baptism of Jesus is about you. You have been made a perfect sample of pure wheat because Jesus was baptized. Your chaff has been completely removed and has been sent further away than what a threshing machine or a combine can do.

Satan loves to show up following a baptism, just as he did after Jesus was baptized to either in an attempt to remind you that you still have some chaff to be removed or tells you that you have no need of Jesus since you are nearly sinless. Jesus delivers you the clear truth today. Your chaff, your sin, has all been removed in your baptism. You are wheat and heaven has been opened for you. Amen