

Baptism of our Lord-January 8, 2023  
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish  
Matthew 3:13-17

“Peaceful and Urgent” Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

Music matters. I can't imagine ending a Christmas candlelight service without singing "Silent Night". I can't imagine going through the season of Lent and never singing "Beneath the Cross of Jesus". "Jesus Christ is Risen Today" is a powerful entrance hymn on Easter morning when the lights of the sanctuary come on, the altar is vested again, and Easter Lilies are placed around the altar as if to sound forth the good news that Jesus is risen from the dead. There are worship hymns that are very fitting for specific worship services.

There are worship songs that are fitting to sing for any worship service. I can't think of a time when "How Great Thou Art" should not be sung. I will be presiding at a funeral tomorrow and this was the family's first request. We will also be singing "Amazing Grace", again, I don't know when the message of this hymn should ever be silent. But singing "Silent Night" on Easter morning just does not seem fitting.

Martin Luther said, **Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise. The gift of language combined with the gift of song was given to man that he should proclaim the Word of God through Music.**

Today is a special day in the church year. On this first Sunday of Epiphany, we are reminded that the first way Jesus reveals himself to us is through his baptism. There are several good songs to sing referring to baptism. Hymnals usually have a section devoted specifically to be sung when there is a baptism. "All Who Believe and are Baptized" is a hymn that is as close to being word for word from scripture as there is about the importance and purpose of baptism. I don't think Casting Crowns wrote the worship song "Who Am I" specifically to be sung for baptisms, but it fits well, and I would put this song in that part of a hymnal. However, few hymns have been written specifically about this gospel reading for today. Neither of the hymn books in front of you in your pews address the topic of why Jesus was baptized. Even Martin Luther who believed in the importance of music during worship didn't write a hymn about this question of why Jesus was baptized that has puzzled Christians ever since Jesus walked into the Jordan River to be baptized by John.

We must turn to the newer Evangelical Lutheran Book of Worship or what some call the Cranberry Hymnal to find this hymn that focuses on the baptism of Jesus. This hymn in comparison to many in the hymnal could be called a contemporary hymn. Francis Bland Tucker, an Episcopalian priest was commissioned to write a hymn specifically about the baptism of Jesus. Tucker wrote this hymn in 1973. Some of us remember that year since we were alive. He doesn't sound all that old since he died in 1984, but he sounds quite old when you hear he was born in 1895.

Regardless of whether you think this hymn is old or new, this Episcopalian priest did a wonderful job of creating a hymn about the baptism of Jesus. The title itself reveals why Jesus was baptized. He wasn't baptized for himself. Since baptism is for the forgiveness of sins and since Jesus was sinless, Jesus did not come to John to be baptized for his own good. Christ was

baptized for you and me. Christ was baptized because although he was without sin, he would become the greatest sinner of all by taking away all our sins and taking them upon himself and nailing them to the cross once and for all time.

Although our gospel account of the baptism of Jesus from Matthew does not use either the word peaceful or urgent as Tucker does in the first verse of the hymn we will soon sing, these are good descriptions of the baptism of Jesus. In Matthew's account of the baptism of Jesus, John the Baptist resists baptizing Jesus for the same reason that we feel Jesus didn't need baptism. John knew that he was a sinner and needed baptism, so he thought the fitting thing would be for Jesus to baptize him. Not the other way around as Jesus came to do. But there was an urgency from Jesus that he must be baptized. Jesus didn't go along with John's thinking and returned to Galilee to be baptized at a more fitting time. Jesus didn't have to go home and think about why he should be baptized. Jesus came to the Jordan River to be baptized by John and he was not leaving the water until John baptized him. Jesus said he must be baptized since it was fitting to fulfill all righteousness. But what did Jesus mean by these words?

The baptism of Jesus was peaceful. There was no work on the part of Jesus, just as there was no effort or decision on your part when you were baptized. In the baptism of Jesus and in your baptism, the heavens are suddenly opened, and the Spirit of God descended like a dove and landed on Jesus. The Spirit knew where to go. It didn't wander around before landing on Jesus, the Spirit lands on whom God places his promise.

It is wonderful to witness a baptism in our parish (East Nidaros) today on the Baptism of our Lord Sunday. On that day, Jesus came to be baptized. Today, Lyric Thurburn came to be baptized. Jesus did not want to wait any longer before being baptized. He knew that he would be taking on the sins of the world and he needed to be told by his heavenly Father that he was his beloved child. Lyric's family felt an urgency to have him baptized. They knew the urgency for Lyric's ears to be opened by the Holy Spirit so that he would be reminded that he too is now God's beloved child, and this promise has been sealed by the Words of God the Father and by the cross of Jesus Christ.

What happens after your baptism? The same thing that happened after Jesus was baptized. Satan appears and attempts to undo the righteousness that you received in your baptism by urging you to listen to him. But you are not Satan's child. You have been claimed as a child of God forever. Satan no longer has any power over you. You have been baptized with Jesus and have been set free from the power of sin and death itself. You now are at complete peace and set free to serve God and your neighbor without any fear of penalty of the law. Jesus has opened heaven wide for you.

Today we remember the baptism of Jesus and remember our baptism. Our baptism that is as peaceful as a dove, yet as urgent as a flame. Amen