

Baptism's Decree

☆ by water and the Word
☆ well pleasing to God

In the Name of Jesus our divine Savior and Brother, God our Friend, dearly redeemed:

Some folks think that livestreaming was invented for COVID times. Actually they were already live-streaming 2000 years ago, back in Jesus' day. Far more than electronically "live," these were living people steaming out of the cities of Judea to go hear live preaching like they'd not known for centuries. Take your Bible from the first book of the New Testament, Matthew, and flip backwards a page to the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, and that's 400 years. There had been minor (short) prophets with a major message like Micah and Zephaniah before; plus major (long) prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, Moses and David. All had been busy prophesying in turn for centuries, the same message: Wretched, rebellious sinners need a Savior, and God is sending us a Savior who will be the *Anointed One*. In Greek the *Anointed One* is *Christ*; in Hebrew *Anointed One* is translated *Messiah*. And then...silence!

400 years with no new prophets, believers had to listen to God's Word. ***"It is written...."*** is vital at times like this. But when God's people heard about a preacher like Elijah wearing camel's hair, eating locusts and wild honey, they went live-streaming out to the wilderness to listen – live! John the Baptist's message was so powerful some thought he might be the Messiah. But John the Baptist corrected them in the first verses of today's Gospel. He pointed to the real Messiah: ***"Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*** (John 1:29) Humans say wrong guy! But God gives **Baptism's Decree....**

☆ by water and the Word

Humans are always choosing the wrong guy because we look at outward appearances. We heard lots of that in today's First Lesson (1 Samuel 16:1-13 EHV¹) The prophet Samuel was so demoralized he didn't want to go to Bethlehem, but the LORD said, ***"I see a king for myself among [Jesse's] sons...You are to anoint for me the person that I point out to you."*** Remember Samuel's first thought when he saw big, strong Eliab? ***"Certainly this is the LORD's anointed."*** I'd have thought the same, wouldn't you? Their first King Saul was tall, why not all? ***But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at how tall he is, because I have rejected him. For the LORD does not look at things the way man does. For man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*** (v.7)

Most of us would think seven sons is a lot. But none of them were the LORD's anointed. ***Samuel said to Jesse, "Is that all of the young men?" Jesse said, "There still is the youngest,"*** the small, insignificant one out ***"tending the sheep."*** ***David...red hair...striking eyes...good-looking – pretty boy? The LORD said, "Get up! Anoint him, because this is the one." So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers. The Spirit of the LORD rushed on David with power from that day forward."*** The least likely son anointed with the Spirit and power!

Ever stop to think how unlikely the son of a carpenter might be for the Messiah? About as unlikely as the rancher's youngest son out there with the sheep becoming king. God does this on purpose. Remember the shepherds on Christmas Eve? God takes the least likely in man's view for God's glory and our good. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: ***"Not many of you were wise from a human point of view, not many were powerful, and not many were born with high status. But God chose the foolish***

¹ EHV ~ Evangelical Heritage Version (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022, Amazon-Kindle, LOGOS.

things of the world to put to shame [the] wise. God chose the weak things of the world to put to shame the...strong, and God chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to do away with the things that are, so that no one may boast before God....Because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us the wisdom from God...our righteousness and sanctification and redemption....As it is written, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:26–31)

So *when all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.* The famous prophet John the Baptist, baptized the most unlikely carpenter's son Jesus of Nazareth. And there Epiphany! By **Baptism's Decree** God's saving will was revealed. **Anointing Uncovered**, this was **New Life by Decree**. God put His **Word** together with the water and made a miracle happen in a most unlikely way. New Life is a miracle for which we named our church. While Jesus was *praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with you."* Later on we are told that *"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the Devil, because God was with him."* (Acts 10:38) **Baptism** is a miracle **by water and the Word**. Don't expect to understand or rationalize this. Just enjoy it. **Baptism's Decree** is...

☆ well pleasing to God

If you children are livestreaming for school and the teacher gives an assignment, do you have to do it? Or can you say, "But it was Zoom! The teacher wasn't really here!" What about a project at work? Do you have to do what your manager says or can you call it "a virtual assignment"?

Words mean things, God's Word most of all. **Baptism** is a miracle by God's **Decree**. What does it mean for you and me? Today's Second Reading (Titus 3:4–7 EHV) says God *saved us – not by righteous works that we did ourselves.* So don't let anyone tell you that the Sacrament of Baptism is man's work. God saved us not by our works or merits but *because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth (born again)...renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior....* Think of your dusty car getting a cool bath of rainwater in the summertime. *So that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs in keeping with the hope of eternal life. Heirs* inherit, you don't work for an inheritance. Baptism makes you shiny new – **well pleasing to God**.

The prophet Zephaniah said it like this: *"The LORD your God is with you as a hero who will save you. He takes great delight in you. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing."* (3:17 EHV) Ever think of God singing, so happy that He saved you? Micah asked, *"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. ¹⁹You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."* (Micah 7:18f NIV84)

Baptized as Jesus commanded *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* – this *baptism saves you also* (1 Peter 3:21), not because you are so devout, so hard working, so faithful, but because God is merciful, wonderful beyond words – at least human words. You are **well pleasing to God** by God's Word. By **Baptism's Decree** the dear Holy Spirit still works powerfully today.

We can pray, "Lord, give me not tasks equal to my strength, but strength equal to my tasks." God singing in delight about saving us, makes us delight to sing too. Isn't that the kind of heartfelt worship God wants? Public worship is the proclamation of the Gospel through the fine arts. And God has given music to move your soul and spirit deep inside to works of love and thanks for God. This can happen even when one is dying, in and out of consciousness. "Go, my children, with my blessing, never alone." (CW21 930) As our dear sister Dorothy Lindig liked to tell me, "Pastor, I'm never alone!" As I ministered to Dorothy on her deathbed, she kept asking about lonely people traveling without a place to stay. "Waking, sleeping, I am with; you are my own." Merciful like our dear Father in heaven caring for us by sending His own Son to be our Savior. I am His and He is mine forever by **Baptism's Decree**. Amen.