Sermon for Sunday, January 7, 2018

Sermon Texts: Mark 1: 4-11

Luke 12: 22-57

Sermon Title: "What Does It All Mean?"

Sermon Topic: Jesus' Baptism

Sermon Purpose: To teach that even though Jesus submitted to being baptized, He didn't need to be baptized for the same reason we are baptized.

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*Sermon Prayer: Father God, You have given us this day and the events held within it. You have also given us Your written and living Word. Now, we pray, guide our hearts and minds as we seek to find Your will in these Scriptures and Your hand at work in our world events.*

 *Now, may the words of my lips and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

 The annual phenomenon that we call Christmas is over for another year. I recently heard one pastor say that you can tell how the economy was doing by the gifts you get at Christmas: a **poor** economy means your Christmas gifts consist of socks and underwear, a **moderate** economy means jewelry and toys, while a **healthy** economy means gifts that require a commitment to the future (like cell phones, cars, engagement rings, and homes).

 Yes, the holiday is over. Merchants have their Valentine displays out already, and behind the counter they're dusting off the Easter Bunny. Even a few spring fashions are appearing on the clothes racks in the stores.

 It's over in the **news** because reports have changed from toys and model railroads, baby dolls and unique gift-giving items, charitable acts and heart-warming human interest tales to crime in the streets and hostility in the marketplace.

 Anywhere you look it's safe to say that the season and the celebrations are over. **But for the Christian**, the abiding reality of what it all means remains with us and - in fact - it's just really **beginning** to sink in.

 Christmas is the reality that God chose to come and live with us - becoming one of us.

 Epiphany is the celebration of what that Christ of the manger accomplished **in** us and **for** us with His life **among** us.

 When Jesus was eight days old, He was taken to the temple, recognized as the Messiah by the prophet Simeon, was circumcised and given a name. It was at this time that the Church received the words to what we clergy-types refer to as the "Nunc Dimitus." This is the Latin form of the first words of Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." (Luke 2: 29-32)

 At Epiphany, Jesus was two years old and was visited by the Wise Men from the East. He received the gifts befitting a king.

 **Next** Sunday, Jesus will be **thirty** years old and will submit to baptism. He will also begin His public ministry. Boy, how time flies!

 Today, we look back at **Epiphany** and we focus on that part - that phase of His Epiphany (His manifestation) that sees Him baptized. And let me tell you something, if you're a sinner like me, we’re going **nowhere without** Jesus Christ as our Savior. Today is a cause for some **real** celebration!

 What does it all mean? Why was Jesus baptized and why was the Father pleased? Why is it a time to be celebrating?

 First, what does it all mean? I remember debating back and forth, in the days of my seminary training, just how old Jesus was when He became aware that He was the Messiah. Theologians call this His "Messianic Consciousness," and no one can say with certainty just **when** Jesus was fully aware that He was the Promised Messiah of the Old Testament.

 Some say He saw the shadow of the cross as He lay in the manger.

 Others say it was when He was the twelve-year-old boy in the temple.

 Still others believe it was sometime during those mysterious "silent years," as they're often called, between the ages of 12 and 30. After all, that's when people start thinking seriously about the purpose and the direction of their lives.

 Well, whatever and whenever that took place, Jesus was fully aware that He was the Son of God and Savior, when He was baptized! That's why John the Baptist was reluctant to baptize Jesus. That's why he protested, "I ought to be baptized by **you**, and you come to **me**!" Our Lord answered, "Let it be so for now ... for in this way we shall do all that God requires."

 I'll be quick to admit that I had an advantage you **didn't** in order to come to these conclusions, because I had the opportunity to look into the background of today's text.

 The voice of God that spoke at Jesus' baptism echoed two passages from the Old Testament:

Psalm 2:7 describes the coming Messiah with God saying,

"This is my beloved Son."

Isaiah 42:1 described God's suffering servant to come

with the voice of God saying,

"With Whom I am well pleased."

 **Therefore you can say with some certainty that Jesus submitted to baptism so He could become your Savior.** To "de-theologize" that biblical truth, let's take a very human example from a very real, human family. A small girl I once knew - she was barely three years old, at the time - had a very strong medication she had to take for a very rare, but very stubborn infection. The medicine was so strong that it was potentially dangerous. Why? Because it could lower the white blood cell count by attacking the bone marrow. Because of this real risk, the poor little tyke had to go to the clinic laboratory once a week while she was taking the medicine. This was the worst part of the treatment. Every week, she had to have a blood test. The first time, she was very fearful of the whole routine, not only because it was new, but also because she knew it would hurt. On the first visit to the clinic, her mother - knowing her daughter's fear - sat down in the lab chair before her daughter and had the technician draw a vial of blood from **her**. The mother tried not to wince, but her face did it involuntarily, anyway. It hurt!!! Now, the mother didn't **need** to have her arm stabbed with a needle and have blood drawn. **She** didn't have any stubborn infection!!! **But she did it for her daughter, to show her she would not die from it.**

 The same things happened when the child had to take one of those castor-oil-like medicines. "Yuuuuck," she thought as she swallowed the teaspoonful. She didn't need that dumb medicine. But, she took it in place of her child, in order to show her child that she wouldn't die from it, even if it was "double-yuuucky."

 **In like manner, Jesus Christ didn’t need to submit to baptism because He needed none of the things baptism gives us!** He didn't need to be baptized to take away His sin -- He never sinned in the first place! He didn't need to be baptized to become God's child -- by His birthright, He was the **only**-begotten Son of God! -- from **eternity!!!**

 Jesus needed none of these things, yet He submitted to baptism so that when He shed His blood on the cross for my sin, the Father didn't go searching for me saying, "Get Him off that cross; go get Bill Weaver. **He's** the one who belongs up there!!" And let me assure you, what happened on Calvary was much more than my Lord getting a blood test or taking a dose of medicine to show me that I wouldn't die from it. They didn't even **draw** His blood! It **flowed** **freely** -- until He was dead! **And that’s why the Babe of Bethlehem** **submitted to being baptized. So** He could be all the things I'm **supposed** to be but am not – **in my place,** on my behalf!

 It may seem strange to be talking about Calvary and the Crucifixion just a couple weeks after we've celebrated Christmas! And yet, it's all right on target. **For today Jesus Christ is taking one giant step on the path that will have Him taking your sins upon Himself.** The baby of the manger grew up! You see, it takes more than a baby's shoulders to carry the weight of our sins, our guilt and shame.

 I’ve spoken about why Jesus **didn’t** need to be baptized, but let me tell you why He **did** need it. Jesus **did** need to be baptized to become part of the visible family of God, on earth; just as **we** need to be baptized to be welcomed into the visible ministry of Christ Jesus on earth, to become part of the family of faith.

 The Evangelist, Corrie Ten Boom was quite a soldier of the cross. She surely knew what it meant to be baptized into Christ Jesus. It's much more then living like you please and then pointing to a Savior to get you off the hook.

 It's much more than just following your own whims and fancies, and then holding up your Baptismal Certificate every time you get caught or your conscience acts up. In one of her books, Corrie Ten Boom tells the story of a trip she once took to Mexico. She asked a question of a young boy she met there. "Are you a child of God?" "Well, Miss," he answered, "I go to church every Sunday." "That's good," Corrie told him, "But you know, every time I walk into my garage, I do not turn into an automobile -- any more than a mouse born in a biscuit tin grows to be a biscuit." "Well," he tried again, "my parents - both of them - are very good Christians." "All right," Corrie replied, "That's very good, but not good enough. Do you know God has no grandchildren?"

 As we observe the Baptism of our Lord, let's not miss the reason He submitted to baptism, what it means **to** us and **for** us, and just how **very** much we are loved by God. And He did it all for us, **instead** of us, **in** **our** **place**. Thank you, blessed Lord Jesus!

Let us pray:

 Father God, as we seek to follow the teaching of Jesus and to serve in the manner He has shown us; give us Your grace, we pray, to know the right, to see the truth, and to do what is just. Grant us the wisdom necessary to promote peace in our time, and to enable others to receive the respect and the hope that is due to all who would believe. In the precious name of Christ our King, we pray. Amen.