



12 January 2025

Baptism of our Lord - Pastor Chris

Ascension Lutheran Church

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

A couple of weeks ago, a friend and colleague, sent out a message requesting favorite Bible verses. She said, if you send me your favorite verse – I will add you to my calendar and use that Bible verse as my prayer for the week while also praying for you each of the seven days. 52 weeks of bible verses and friends prayed over. Well – of course. Who doesn't need someone praying for them? I was quick to respond – 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:5-6: **<sup>5</sup>For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus's sake. <sup>6</sup>For it is the God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.** My Confirmation verse as well as one of the scriptures read at my ordination. It serves as a reminder that my life is to point to the One who saves not the one who tells others about the Savior.

**"I baptize you with water;" says John the Baptist, "but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."**

John has literally been waiting his whole life for this moment. Meeting his cousin, Jesus, at the river Jordan. I wonder what was going through John's mind. When his disciples finally see Jesus coming down the hill to the river's edge. Take your pick at John's thoughts...Finally! How long O Lord? Well, what took you so long Jesus?

What we get instead is the same obedient reverence we hear from our friend Mary at the visit of the angel Gabriel. **"Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" says John in the book of John. "This is the One! The One I told you was coming after me but who is really ahead of me. This is the man I've been talking about. This is the Son of God!**

Without any sarcastic response to the long wait – some 400 years since the last prophet spoke and another 30 years give or take from the moment at the manger, John simply announces the arrival. All the preparations have come to an end. "Prepare the way of the Lord, makes straight in the desert a way for our God." Whatever is left to be done, well it is no longer necessary. God has come. It is time to begin again. To let go of what has been and welcome the God who comes to us. It is time to "walk in the light"/it is time to "walk wet." Because the God who promised to come and save us has come to save us. And like the Magi of last Sunday, we will go home by another road, leaving behind what we have known, following the baptized Savior from the muddy banks of the Jordan, shaking water from our shoes and leaving wet footprints behind. I am grateful to follow.

Into the world we go – wildfires, earthquakes, discrimination, broken relationships, addiction, school shootings, famine, veteran suicides, social isolation, lack of mental health care, greed at the expense of everyone and everything, and an overwhelming feeling of doom. I am not just grateful to follow. I prefer to follow.

How shall we celebrate the baptism of our Lord this day? Hear this revision of Psalm 29 - A river in flood is an awesome sight. 1 Don't try to cross the river alone, my child. 2 Let your father carry you. 3 The waves are higher than your head; the torrent will sweep you away. 4,5 It rolls the rocks in their beds; it bites earth from its banks; even mighty trees topple and fall. 6 But you will be safe in your father's arms. He will hold your head above water; 7 His feet will stand firm against the flood. 8 Trust him. Wrap your arms around his neck, where he can murmur comfort in your ear. 9 Then you will know the torrent cannot touch you. 11 Your father is much stronger than you are. Trust him to carry you to safety.



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Remember where we started...<sup>5</sup> **For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus's sake.** <sup>6</sup> **For it is the God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.** The light of the knowledge of the glory of God reflects more than just the promise of life with our Savior. The Apostle Paul goes on...<sup>7</sup> **But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.** <sup>8</sup> **We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair,** <sup>9</sup> **persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed,** <sup>10</sup> **always carrying around in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.** <sup>11</sup> **For we who are living are always being handed over to death for Jesus's sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our mortal flesh.** <sup>12</sup> **So death is at work in us but life in you."**

Well now what?

The light of the knowledge of the glory of God reflects both God's promise of life to us and the death of Jesus that brings us the promise of resurrection. The waters of baptism were ever only meant to be a moment of water on our heads. Yes – we have friends who will plunge deep into the river. For some, that is the shock and awe of baptism. But the result is the same. However, you come to the water. It is God who invites, and it is God who washes you clean by waking you up to all that God wants for your life and all that God calls you to give up and let go of so that all that you are is received as gift from the One who calls you by name.

Baptism creates a relationship between each of us and Jesus. It gives us a new identity as a follower of Jesus. Baptism is a one-time event, but it takes a lifetime to understand what it means. It unites us with Christ and renews our faith daily. A sign of God's mercy and forgiveness. It is God's promise to be present with you wherever you may go. So that even this treasure in clay jars, however fragile, belongs to God and does not come from us. What does John promise us this day?

**"But one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." This is your charge. What more do we need than the Holy Spirit and fire to challenge the problems of this world?** Wildfires and earthquakes, discrimination and broken relationships, school shootings and social isolation, addiction and an overwhelming feeling of doom. We are followers of Jesus. We cannot play small. God has little time for us to play small. We cannot limit ourselves or hold back from following in the footsteps of our Savior. God's call on our lives is about acknowledging the courage already inside of us to take hold of all that we are, that we might follow without letting our fear, our self-doubt and every other hang-up prevent us from following the One who has already shown us the way. We are the ones who bring the Kingdom of God near as we follow where Jesus leads. Take a deep breath – the good news is that you do not have to figure out where you are going – you only need follow the one who calls you by name. So, get your feet wet again. Wipe the tears from your eyes again. Lift up your heads and remember who you are – a child of the Most-High God.

And as our friends in El Salvador remind us...it helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us. No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything. This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future



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promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers - not master builders, ministers - not messiahs. We are prophets of a future that is not our own. People of God, you have been called to the water's edge. But you have been here before. Today, is about feeling the water on your face once again and waking up to all that God promises you in this life and the next. Thanks be to God! Amen.