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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
January 16, 2022
2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: 1 Samuel 16:1-13, Titus 3:4-7

Hymns: 41; 245; 315:1-2,4-5; 309

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

¹⁵ Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ *or* not, ¹⁶ John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fan *is* in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."

²¹ When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened.

²² And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Epiphany Season – Seeing God in Jesus --

Last Sunday we celebrated the Epiphany! We rejoiced that the Light of the glory of God has shined upon all the peoples of this earth. The Light of salvation has shined upon us, and it has shined in our hearts. We rejoiced to know that Jesus was born to be our Savior, the Savior of the entire world.

As the Epiphany season continues, we will continue to look at Jesus. With Christmas and Epiphany meditations we focused on Jesus as God who came into the flesh. For the rest of the Epiphany season, we will turn that around and see how Jesus is revealed to be true God, and so the Christ of God.

Our text this morning takes us to the connection between John the Baptist and Jesus and answers many questions about the Christ. We see how the Lord used the ministry of John the Baptist for--

THEME: Setting the Record Straight Concerning Christ.

First of all, there was a need for setting the record straight. God presented His record in Holy Scripture concerning who and what the Promised Christ was to be. The problem arises with people setting their own expectations for what they would like to see in a Savior for the world, instead of a Savior from sin and the wickedness of this world. So, it was in the days of John the Baptist. Our text tells us of --

I. People Living in Expectation.

“Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not.” (v.15)

John was a powerful figure that made a deep impression upon the people. People were looking and they were wondering, is it time for the Christ to come into the world? Could this John be the Christ of the prophecies? There were others that had come before John the Baptist that had rallied the people to rise up against the Greek dynasty that had subjugated the people of Israel. People had looked to them as the Christ because they fit their expectations. They were looking for a powerful figure who could rally the people into action, as these earlier men had done, throwing off the shackles of

oppression and even purifying the temple from the horrendous idolatry that had been imposed upon it by those wicked tyrants.

Once again when John came on the scene people had expectations. People were looking, but many of those watching for the Messiah were hoping for a dynamic political leader who would be able to lead the people in throwing off the shackles of Rome as the Maccabees had thrown off the shackles of the Greeks. Their expectations combined religious fervor with social and political goals. Indeed, the temporal and political often outweighed the spiritual in many people's minds. There was a need to set the record straight, and John did that with the bold proclamation of the Word of God.

In our time, in our culture people are once again living in expectation. And so we should! We are repeatedly directed by the Scriptures to keep watch for the second coming and the glorious reappearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. But what expectations do people hold in their hearts for Christ's coming? What expectations do people have for the church in these last days? What is the source of people's expectations? Often their expectations flow from their own vision of what the world, or American society should be like. And that can be as different in our country as we see in the vision that different political parties have for America. Many expectations of what Christ should be about in today's world are focused on social agendas, political goals and even environmental issues.

All these are matters that may concern devout Christians as they live their lives as American citizens, however we should recognize that these social and political expectations are not the primary concern that the Lord has for us as His people. The Lord is focused on our spiritual state. The Lord is focused on our need for spiritual deliverance from sin that brings eternal destruction. The Lord would establish expectations of eternal salvation from sin and death and from this sin corrupted world.

These are far greater and higher expectations than those that flow from the mind of man, and these expectations are fulfilled in Christ. There is still an urgent need for people in the world that the record be set straight. What we find in our text is that --

II. John Tells the Straight Truth about Christ.

John's response to the crowd concerning their wondering about him was direct. John was not the Christ. He made no claims to greatness. Jesus openly declared that John was a great prophet, the greatest of men born of a woman, (Luke 7:28) so it wasn't that John was insignificant. John was called by the Lord to be the forerunner of Christ, preparing the way of the Lord. What John recognized was the true greatness of our Savior.

“John answered, saying to all, “I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.¹⁷ His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.” (v.16-17)

The comparison is significant, Jesus declared that John as the greatest of prophets. John said that he wasn't worthy to serve Jesus in the lowliest of capacity, so great is Jesus compared to John. This wasn't false modesty or feigned humility as we see so often in the political figures of this world when they claim to be humbled in receiving some great recognition. This was the reality of the situation, a reality that all people, especially all believers in Christ should recognize.

Familiarity with Jesus, knowing how He loves us and cares for us, knowing how He sympathizes with us in our weaknesses and in our struggles in life may have the reverse effect that it should have. We may take Christ for granted. We sometimes forget the greatness and glory and the power and the dominion that is Christ Jesus. We forget how truly lowly and undeserving we are before Him, and yet He grants us His peace and His presence. Jesus is the source of every blessing. It is Jesus who sends His Spirit into our hearts that we might be called to faith. The Father delivered all judgment to Jesus because it was Jesus who had secured our salvation by redeeming a lost and sinful world with His precious blood. So, Jesus was the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

John spoke of Jesus' power, both to bring souls into eternal life, and to relegate them to eternal perdition. Jesus sees the heart. He does not judge by outward appearances. He knows those who believe in Him for eternal life, and He knows those who do not. He will separate the chaff, or the spiritual empty hulls, from the wheat, from those who have saving faith in His name. He will gather His own to Himself in heaven, while the chaff will be thrown into the fire.

That is the straight truth about Jesus. that is the reality of His power and authority. That is the straight truth! What's the message? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. There is no other way to life and salvation. He is the Christ whom God sent into the world. Our text makes this abundantly clear.

III. With Jesus' Baptism God Presents Jesus as the Christ.

“When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. ²²And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.” (v.21-22)

John's baptism was a baptism for the remission of sins. How great a blessing that was for the many, many people that came to John to be baptized in the Jordan River! How great a spiritual blessing baptism continues to be for sinners who receive this *“washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit!”* (Titus 3:5) When so many others were coming to John to be baptized Jesus also came to be baptized by John. John immediately recognized this truth, **Jesus had no need for this washing for the remission of sins.** Jesus had no sin to wash away. He was *“holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners,”* (Hebrews 7:26) and yet Jesus presented Himself to John to be baptized by him, in fact, Jesus insisted on it.

There was a lot riding on this event that had to do with our salvation, and that had to do with a clear statement of who Jesus is. Jesus stated that it was a matter of fulfilling all righteousness. Jesus was baptized and so fulfilled all righteousness. Jesus was the One who came down to earth to bear our sins in His own body. Jesus was baptized not for His own benefit, but for your benefit

and mine. It was all about Jesus being the complete and perfect Savior for all mankind. He did all that He might provide a perfect righteousness which God credits to any and all who believe in Jesus' name for forgiveness, life, and salvation.

And then there was a most wondrous revelation. As Jesus was coming up out of the water our text tells us He was praying. Jesus was praying, and what happened next must be seen as a response to that prayer. The heaven was opened, meaning that which is normally not seen or heard from God was seen and heard both for Jesus and for John. The two remarkable revelations from God were the Holy Spirit descending in the visible bodily form of a dove resting upon Jesus, and the voice of God the Father proclaiming Jesus to be His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased!

With the event of His baptism Jesus was entering the next phase of His life, that of His public ministry in which Jesus presented Himself to the world as the Christ of God. As we look upon this remarkable revelation at Jesus' baptism we see a wondrous significance for Jesus who in His humiliation dealt with the challenges of life as we do, without the use of His divine power. The challenge that lay before Jesus in His ministry was enormous, beyond human imagining.

The encouragement and strengthening Jesus received was surely an answer to Jesus' prayer. He had the unequivocal endorsement of God the Father. The truth is proclaimed, this Jesus is God's Son, His one and only Son whom God sent into the world for our salvation! This is the Christ of God. Add to that the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit descending and not only coming to Jesus but abiding with Jesus ensures that all that Jesus would undertake had the Spirit's blessing. All that Jesus did was not done on His own initiative, but as the fulfillment of the plan and purpose of God for the salvation of the world.

What this means for us is that we know the one true God, the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit worked together in harmony for our salvation. We see the inaugural of Jesus as the Christ. We are assured that Jesus is our Savior and our God. As the Christ all His actions, all His preaching, all His miracles and signs and wonders, all His sufferings, His death and resurrection,

ALL was done that we might be delivered from sin's curse and be assured of eternal life in His name.

So it is that the gospels reveal Jesus to us that we might see God in Jesus, the one and only God, the God of our salvation. All glory to His name both now and forever!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.