

**The Baptism of Jesus at the Jordan**  
**Mark 1:4-11**  
**HUMC10 January 2020**

Once there was a church that had outgrown their sanctuary and they were looking for a larger meeting place. When the trustees learned that a certain building that they were interested in was available, they recommended to the entire church body that they purchase the building and remodel it.

After a year of fixing the interior of the newly renovated church, a new baptistery was installed. It looked like a rectangular Jacuzzi, but it's purpose for immersion type of baptisms.

Once the baptistery was set in place, the county building inspector was called in to approve the project, but he wouldn't. He told the trustees "I can't approve this unless this baptism tank has a separate septic tank. It is to avoid the pollution that would run into the ground."

Then one trustee put a theological spin on it and said with a grin, "I guess this baptismal tank would cause some pollution with all those sins that will be washed away."

Our scripture reading now moves us from Christ's early years to his baptism. This is also the time in our church calendar when we remember our infant baptism based on the promises made for us or the vows we made in our immersion type of baptism when we were able to answer for ourselves. **My text is Mark 1:4-11.**

<sup>4</sup>And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. <sup>6</sup>John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup>I baptize you with<sup>Ⓜ</sup> water, but he will baptize you with<sup>Ⓜ</sup> the Holy

Spirit.”<sup>9</sup> At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.<sup>10</sup> Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.<sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

In our scripture text, Mark introduces Jesus as an adult. Eighteen years had passed from the time he was lost and was found in the temple. Jesus was now thirty years of age and it is believed his father Joseph had passed away and Jesus’ other siblings were old enough to care for their home and mother.

At this point, our Lord walks some 70 miles from Nazareth to the Jordan River to be baptized. To put this in perspective, it is like one of us walking from Hillsboro to Boston, MA. So when Jesus arrived, there was a **strange** man in a **strange** place who preached a **strange** message of repentance followed up by baptism which was a **strange** custom according to Jewish standards.

What was unique about Jesus’ baptism was the presence of the Trinity or the three persons in the Godhead. First there was the dove, which signified the Holy Spirit. That was followed by the voice of the Father who expressed approval and Jesus himself who came up out of the water.

For many of us, our spiritual journey began at baptism, when we were infants. A time when our parents brought us into the church and made a promise before God to raise us in the Christian faith.

Then there are others who were baptized later in life who previously invited Christ into their hearts, then their baptism would become a promise to live for Jesus the rest of their lives.

Early Christians called baptism a "Sacramentum" which is the same Latin word for the Roman soldier's oath of absolute devotion and obedience to their general.

And that is the core of what our baptism is. It is a lifetime of obedience to the Lord. A commitment to follow the Lord through thick and thin, the good times and the bad, in sickness and in health, all the days of our lives. Baptism is a public declaration that we are now followers of the Lord.

There is an interesting website called Ceremonyway.com. It features religious and secular ceremonies. The founder Emma Drouillard of San Francisco also offers a baptism style ceremony where God is never mentioned, no one is offended and there are no commitments. Emma tells of a conversation she had with a California couple in 1995.

The parents said, "We just wanted a larger spirit to guide our daughter, but we didn't want to get specific. We wanted all her bases covered. We do Christianity L-I-T-E for our baby, who believes in angels and fairies, leprechauns and Santa Claus."

I have met some families who have thought along these lines. It is like checking the block or the term I hear most often, "getting it done."

In contrast to that, I have had many families who take their promises of their baptismal or dedication vows seriously or they are diligent about teaching their children, grandchildren or great grandchildren in the Christian faith.

When we lived in Oklahoma in the late 1990's and I was stationed at Ft Sill, it was July 4 and since it was close to 100 degrees, we decided to go for a swim in a place called Tom Steed Lake. While in the water, we saw a crowd of people begin to walk across the sand towards the lake.

However, this group was not dressed for the beach. There was an older looking man who carried a book and I quickly understood that we were about to witness a baptism. And out of respect, jet skiers and swimmers moved out of the way. They instinctively knew what was about to happen.

After the people began to sing "Shall We Gather at the River". After this the minister spoke about the man who was about to be baptized. He looked like he was about 70 years old and had recently asked Jesus to come into his heart and was serious about living for God.

After those brief comments, the minister took the older man's hand, waded into waist high water and the man was baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. As the man walked towards the shore, he was dripping wet, but in spite of that fact, he got hugs, handshakes and congratulations from everyone.

The last baptism I conducted was for Malcolm at Franklin Pierce Lake on a very hot July day. It was very similar and special. Baptism identifies who we are and it points back to the work of God and forward to our life of faith.

With our Christian baptism, Jesus joins us on the road of our spiritual pilgrimage. He becomes part of our joys and sorrows, our successes and failures.

Let me explain how this works. Suppose I take this tea bag put in a cup and pour hot water over it. Slowly, the tea will begin to mix with the water which makes the tea and the water one". In a figurative sense, we are the tea bag. The water is the baptism and our relationship with God. With the Lord in our lives, He joins Himself to our inner spirit, our mind, will and emotions.

The power of baptism rests not in the drops of water, but when we combine the promises of God, and with that public declaration we are marked with God's ownership.

So, when we take our baptism seriously, we will find that we are in a covenantal relationship with God. There is now an expectation for that God can use me, anytime and anywhere.

In the book of Acts, it was Paul the Apostle who told new converts, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Many years ago, Matthew Henry who wrote a commentary on the entire Bible, was baptized in a church as a child. But his father Philip did something rather unusual. In addition to the vows he made at the church to raise his son in the Christian faith, he wrote his own baptismal statement for his son. Let me read it to you and if you are in agreement, make it your prayer as well.

I take God to be my chief end and highest good.

I take God the Son to be my prince and Savior.

I take God the Holy Spirit to be my sanctifier, teacher, guide and comforter.

I take the Word of God to be my rule in all my actions and the people of God to be my people under all conditions.

I do hereby dedicate and devote to the Lord all that I am, all that I have and all I can do. And this I do deliberately, freely and forever.

Martin Luther once said we should begin every day by remembering our baptism. When we feel the water on our faces

the first thing in the morning, it should remind us of the waters of our baptism.

Jesus' final words was "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:19).

This morning as we remember our baptism, I would like to invite you to come to the baptismal fount, place your hand in the basin, kneel at the altar and remember your baptism.

Remember that it was through baptism that we, or our parents for us, made a commitment to follow Jesus.

If your parents made that commitment for you, it is a time to renew and make a fresh commitment for yourselves in this year of 2021.

If there is anyone here that would like to be baptized, I would be happy to have a baptismal service at Franklin Pierce Lake in the summer time.

Let us pray ...