

The Baptism of our Lord – 2021

Genesis 1:1-5

Romans 6:1-11

Mark 1:4-11

How many of y'all believe that we, as a people, have lost our sense of direction? How many of y'all believe that losing our sense of direction puts us at a disadvantage? How many of y'all believe that the unhappy situation in which we find ourselves is the fault of Covid-19? How many of y'all believe that Covid-19 is simply a diagnostic instrument, which is to say, that the coronavirus has simply exposed our loss of our sense of direction as a people? How many of y'all believe that it potentially will get worse before it gets better?

Have you ever been lost, in a physical sense, not knowing which way to go? Mild concern can turn to anxiety fairly quickly. Do you believe that our culture is anxious? I believe that. It doesn't take a particularly perceptive person to know that our culture is anxious. The question is, why have we become so anxious? To be sure, there are some pretty straightforward reasons as to why anxiety has mushroomed. Small businesses have suffered horribly at the hands of governmental health policy. Whether you agree with the policy or not, it is inarguable that much suffering has come because of it. Economic ruin does not make anybody's day. Studies are showing a radical increase in suicide, drug and alcohol addiction, and domestic abuse. Again, whether you agree with the policy or not, children learning apart from the school is not a huge success story. The impoverished are being left further behind, education itself is not at a premium, and emotional scars are being left on a sizable portion of our children. It is not the job of this pulpit to take potshots against public policy nor is it our intention to stick our head in the sand to things going on around us in order to avoid anything that might be construed as political. The point is straightforward: we seem to have lost our sense of direction and this cultural loss produces anxiety.

Our catechism says that we are to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. That is Martin Luther's explanation to the First Commandment: You shall have no other gods. That explanation helps reclaim our sense of direction. Whatever goes on in the culture around us, we are Christians first. The lukewarm are likely not to recover their sense of direction. The lukewarm in the Scriptures are a reference to those who are Christians in name only. It's found in the book of Revelation and it is a reference to the church in Laodicea. God speaking: "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:15-16). "Though the church at Laodicea may have looked good enough outwardly, it had grown self-satisfied and thus indifferent to growing in faith and spreading the Word. Given this church's severe stagnation, it needed to be shaken up" (Lutheran Study Bible).

Shaken up; is God shaking us up? It sure seems like it. To what end? What do you suppose God would have of His church at this time? How are we to look at death? How are we to respond to death? Where does our hope lie? What is our witness to be? Answering these questions properly will also help restore our sense of direction. Christianity is not a parlor game. You're in or you're out. Christianity is not a pleasant diversion to an otherwise happy existence. Christians are desperate. They are desperate for life and Christ is the only One who has it. They

are desperate for forgiveness and Christ is the only one who dispenses it. They are desperate for hope, love, grace and Christ is the divine Source of all this and more. Yeah, we need shaking up. Lukewarm is out of fashion at Christ the King. Let us all confess it – not about someone else, but about ourselves. Each of us, in our own way, has had an ongoing affair with the world. St. James writes this: “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” (James 4:4). Apply that to yourself and repent. Your sense of direction is to be honed.

The Lord Christ knew what direction His life was to take. The Jordan River – He must go there. John was there, baptizing sinners. Flocks of sinners, herds of sinners, gaggles of sinners – they were all going out to John to be baptized. He was preparing the people. All the country of Judea and all Jerusalem was shaken up. The uncompromising law of God exposed their adulterous hearts and they fled for refuge to John and the Jordan. He was baptizing sinners. He was preparing the way for the coming King. The desperate went to John. They had left behind their lukewarm spiritual disposition. They gladly confessed their sins and were washed.

Jesus went there. His sense of direction took Him to where sinners were, to where sinners needed Him. Jesus had no sins to repent of, no unrighteousness to be washed off. And yet He is baptized. Down into the water the Lord of life descends. He begins His public ministry this way. Like everything else in His life, He does not do this for Himself but for you. If all those sinners had their iniquity washed off, someone has to bear them. There is no theological plug in the Jordan that John pulls in order for lust and greed and hate and deceit and pride to simply go down the drain. Christ is in that water to have sins washed onto Him. The refuse of human filth is washed onto the Holy Son of God. He shoulders it. He was made man to assume it, to allow it to invade His being, and then to suffer God’s wrath against it. Your salvation comes in no other way. His sense of direction took Him to the Jordan River just like His sense of direction took Him to the place of the cross. He stood in that water because He stands with every sinner, every death riddled son of Adam, every unholy daughter of Eve. He takes what is ours: covetousness, faithlessness, perversion, and all manner of pollution in our soul. He gives us what is His: purity, integrity, holiness, life, fidelity, truth, and all the good that resides in Him. It is an exchange – a baptismal exchange.

His baptism in water in the Jordan River led to His baptism in His own blood at Golgotha. They are not so much two separate events but one divine undertaking. For you; that you may live. For you; that death would not claim you. For you; that heaven be your home. Your sense of direction... where does it come from? How important is it to you? How much do you rely on it? The Holy Spirit – Jesus receives the Spirit when He is baptized (Mark 1:10). The Spirit that Jesus receives at His baptism, He gives up in death (John 19:30). The Spirit that He gave up in death He pours out on the church at Pentecost (Acts 2). The Spirit Jesus pours out on the church at Pentecost He gave to you when you were baptized. That is your sense of direction – the Holy Spirit.

To the eyes of faith, the water of baptism is a rosy red for God has tucked the blood of His Son in that water. The blood of the crucified and risen Savior washed you and made you Holy. The old man in you, the sinful man that is in love with the world, was crucified with Christ when you were baptized. You were united to Him in that water and you were raised a new creation – the

old is gone, the new has come. You have been set free from sin. When Jesus came out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening. For you! What Adam and Eve closed, the Incarnate Son of God has opened. He knows the way. His sense of direction is flawless. We follow Him. He is the way.