

A Baptism

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Preacher: Cory Brock

[0 : 00] Well today we conclude our Advent series on Jesus' early life. And Jesus' early life is from the time that he's a baby all the way up to the time he's 30 years old.

So it's a very long early life. In fact, in the book of Luke, chapters 1 through 3 cover 30 years of Jesus' life, and the rest of the book of Luke is only about three years.

And today we look at the beginning of that three-year ministry. It's Jesus' baptism. And Jesus' baptism has so many faces to it.

It's very multifaceted. There's so many questions that come up when we read about Jesus' baptism, especially if you read it in light of the whole of this passage, which we only read the beginning of it, beginning and end.

And my assignment today is to give a homily. Homilies are just short sermons. A homily. That's what Derek's told me to do. So it's his fault.

[0 : 57] It's his fault that we can't talk about all the many faces of Jesus' baptism. Now I'm just kidding. There's so much. I say this every time. There's so many questions that come up with a passage like this.

And so, well, let me give you one. One of the major questions surrounding Jesus' baptism, or the baptism of John, which we read about at the very beginning, is that what is the difference between John's baptism and the baptism that we practice today in the church?

In our tradition, we don't think that those are the same baptisms. And John even says it in the middle of the passage. We didn't read this, but in verse 16, John says that, I came to baptize you with water, but the one that comes after me, he will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Spirit. So he's drawing a distinction. There's a difference in the baptism I'm offering and the baptism that is to come. What's the difference? Well, I'm not going to answer it. I've just asked a question and I'm not going to answer it, and that's how you always preach a great sermon.

You ask questions and then you don't answer them. Now, what we're going to focus on is just one central facet to Jesus' baptism, the most central, I think, in the way I understand it.

[2 : 08] And that's simply this. We're going to look at two very brief things. One will take up 90% of our 15 minutes and one will take up 10%. The first is this, Jesus' baptism is our gospel.

And secondly, Jesus' baptism is our example. So first, Jesus' baptism is our gospel. It's our gospel, the first thing.

Baptism is a sign of repentance. That's what the Bible teaches us. And we saw it here, even with John's baptism. John's baptism is a sign of repentance. So you see in verse 3, he makes that clear. John went into all the region proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Later on in the passage, we didn't read this, but he condemns the Pharisees and says, you ought to live in accordance with the baptism of repentance.

You should live a life of repentance and you don't. You brood of vipers, he tells them. So his message was that he's come to baptize, in other words, to proclaim a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

[3 : 16] We baptize with water because water is a symbol of purification, of cleansing. And so the water pours over the person being baptized and it's a sign, it's a symbol, and it's a reminder.

It's saying, I'm not clean. I need to be washed. I'm a sinner. I need to be forgiven. And it comes from images in the Old Testament or acts in the Old Testament where the major problem when sin entered the world was that God was separated from his people.

He walked in the garden with Adam and Eve and as soon as sin entered the world, his relationship, the relationship we had with God to walk with him hand in hand in this material world was broken.

And so all throughout the Old Testament we have the idea that human beings are unclean and so God prescribes cleanliness laws so that humans can enter into his presence. And water was always a symbol of purification.

You want to be with God, you have to be purified. So the major problem was always we want to be with God and we can't, we need to be cleansed. Baptism is a sign that says I'm a sinner in need of cleansing, of purification, of forgiveness.

[4 : 23] It's a metaphor. Now there's a problem. Verse 21 is a problem because Luke is so nonchalant.

Did you catch it? Now when all the people were baptized and when Jesus had also been baptized, oh boy. You see, he just said this baptism is about repentance.

It's a sign of repentance and of the forgiveness of sins. And in verse 21 says, oh by the way, and Jesus was baptized too. Now you see the problem.

Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is Messiah. Jesus is sinless. And Luke just nonchalantly says after Jesus had been baptized, just like all the rest. What?

Wait a minute. Why would this man be baptized in a baptism of repentance, in a baptism of the forgiveness of sins? How do we make sense of that?

[5 : 18] The baptism, the virgin birth only appears in two of the gospels, but the baptism appears in all four of our gospels. And Matthew is the one that elaborates most on Jesus' baptism.

And in Matthew chapter 3, there's a little bit of extra what Luke or John or Mark offer. In Matthew chapter 3, John stops Jesus, you remember, and says, you come to me to be baptized.

I should be baptizing you. Why would you come to me to be baptized when I'm the one that ought to be baptized by you? I'm not worthy to baptize you, John's saying.

And there's a principle that John's teaching in Matthew 3 that makes a little bit more sense of Jesus' baptism. What's the question that John is asking Jesus? What are you doing coming here and taking my place?

What are you doing here coming and taking my place? In other words, he's saying, you for me and me for you. This doesn't make sense to me. This is a baptism of repentance. You for me, me for you.

[6 : 21] You see, the central idea in Jesus' baptism is that this is a substitution. This is a substitution. You for me, me for you. John says it.

Why would you baptize me? What about that does you? And this is substitution is central to all of Jesus' ministry. So just think about Jesus' ministry with me for a moment.

Immediately in the pages, just following this, a number of things happen. We see in verse 22 that it says this baptism is the beginning of Jesus' ministry. It's an anointing for his ministry.

Now what was his ministry like? Immediately after this, he goes and he identifies with sinners. He goes and he eats with the tax collector.

He goes and John, right after the baptism, he goes and meets a woman at the well and she's a prostitute and he takes a drink from her.

[7 : 18] The second thing he does right after this is he goes and he touches the most unclean. So in Luke chapter 5, he goes and he sees a leper outside of the city who is the most ceremonially unclean person, the person who most needed purification and he goes and he touches it.

He says, Lord, if you will touch me, I will be clean. And Jesus says, I will be clean. And he touches him. And multiple times in the rest of the gospels, the disciples say, don't do it.

Don't touch the leper. Don't touch the unclean man. Why? because anybody who touches an unclean sinner becomes unclean. You see? The uncleanliness is absorbed.

Now you see what Jesus is doing at the very outside of his ministry. He goes and he eats dinner with sinners, with tax collectors, with traders.

He touches the ceremonial unclean. Everybody who's unclean in the society, he goes and he gets contaminated by. He absorbs them into himself.

[8 : 20] He absorbs their, you see what's happening? He who knew no sin became sin. The principle was always substitution.

He comes and he touches the man and he takes what the man had and absorbs it into himself and offers him life. You see, it's always, his whole ministry was characterized by substitution.

One of the most prominent examples of this is exactly what he does immediately following his baptism. So as soon as Jesus has baptized the very next chapter, he's driven out into the

wilderness by the Spirit.

And in the wilderness, how long does he stay? 40 days. And he's tempted to abdicate his responsibility as Savior three times by Satan.

And this is not a coincidence. You see, the reason this happens is because he's reliving the experience of Israel after they cross the Red Sea.

[9 : 19] Israel entered into the wilderness for how long? 40 years, just like Jesus enters the wilderness for 40 days. Israel has tempted multiple times to abdicate its responsibility.

And what happens with Israel? They sin, they lose, they abdicate. Jesus in the temptation is reliving Israel's experience, but without sin. You see, he's substituting.

He's saying every single righteous act you were supposed to perform, I'm coming and I'm doing it for you. And so when he comes to be baptized by John and John says, you for me, me for you, Jesus says yes to fulfill all righteousness.

What does he mean? He means to come and act righteously in every way as you ought to have done to absorb human sin yet always be sinless.

The principle was always substitution from the very outset of his ministry. How does his ministry end? Each Christ ministry ends in death and substitutionary atonement.

[10 : 19] He becomes sin all the way to the point of death. What is Jesus' baptism? What is Jesus' baptism? You see, he begins his ministry the same way he ended it in death.

Jesus' baptism is not a baptism of purification. He didn't need purification. It's a baptism of substitutionary death. And let me explain that for a second.

In the Old Testament, which is what all that we have up to the point of the early chapters of Luke, Jesus is an Israelite, he's a Jew. And in the Old Testament, water almost always referred to judgment.

And we talked about that last semester in our Mission of God series. We looked at the crossing of the Red Sea. Remember in the crossing of the Red Sea, water is the great sign of judgment.

It pours over. The Israelites have to go under the water and come out of the water in new life. It's just like coming out from death to life again. But even before that, more significant than even the Red Sea is the first great water judgment.

[11 : 27] Where's the first great water judgment at the Flood? The text in Genesis at the Flood says that the heavens opened and the rains poured forth. Because he got judged the world through water.

Water's always been a sign for Israel of judgment, of death. Now one of the only other places in the whole Bible that it says the heavens were opened is when God sends the flood rains and the flood rains of judgment.

And did you catch it here in our passage when all the people had been baptized in verse 21, when Jesus had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened? There it is.

Now look, every Israelite would have seen it. That language is a direct quote from the book of Genesis. When the heavens were opened to flood the earth, the great first water judgment of the world.

When God sends water, he judges. That's what the Israelites thought. But now the heavens have been opened. You see what's happening? When Jesus goes down under the water.

[12 : 33] John puts Jesus under the water, Jesus is saying, this is death. I'm going under God's water judgment for you. Why would you be baptized for me, John says, to fulfill your right?

He's going to death. It's a symbol. It's a symbol of the cross. He's being put under the water of judgment. The waters of the Noeik flood, you see.

The last time the heavens opened, it poured forth water judgment. And now this time, Jesus Christ gets water judgment so that when the heavens opened, something else comes down.

Every time the heavens opened, we human beings deserve water judgment. But Jesus baptism is a symbol that in this man for you, now when the heavens opened, you don't get judgment.

You get a dove. You see, a dove came down, the spirit. Now what was the great sign of peace at the flood?

[13 : 31] It was a dove. A dove went and brought back the branch of peace and that became the great symbol in the prophets of peace. The prophets speak in Isaiah 11, for instance, of the branch that would come, the dove's branch, the olive branch that would come.

And this time the spirit, the dove, the dove of peace doesn't bring a branch because why? Because this man is the branch, interesting little proof of that.

The Hebrew word for branch is the word natsar, N-A-Z-A-R. And most scholars think, it's used all throughout the Old Testament, there's a natsar coming, Isaiah says, a branch coming, a messiah, right?

And most scholars think that every time it talks about Jesus the Nazarene in the Gospels, it's already done at once in Luke. Because he is the natsarene, you see, natsar means branch, it means the place of the branch.

Jesus wasn't born in Nazareth, but he became Jesus of Nazareth. Why? Because he was fulfilling the scriptures. You see, there's no olive branch of peace here because Jesus is the natsar, he's the Nazarene, he is the branch.

[14 : 42] This is the great reversal, this baptism of the water judgment of the flood. You see, now that the heavens are opened, because of this man, we no longer get judgment, we get peace.

We get the presence of God. By the way, this is the first place in the Bible where all three persons of the Trinity appear in the material world together.

At the same time, the Father's voice, the Spirit as dove, and Jesus the Son. Here's the point, he went under the waters of judgment when John laid his head back into that river.

In order that when he rose again from the water, the heavens would open, and he would no longer deliver judgment to his people, to this world, but peace, his presence.

The dove, it's a sign that he came to die for us, that's the point of his baptism. Now, this means that Jesus' baptism simply means that it's an announcement of his ministry.

[15 : 48] His ministry from start to finish was to be for you. The substitution from the very get-go, you for me, me for you, John says?

Yes, and all the way to the cross. You see, from baptism of water judgment, all the way to the cross. One of the early church fathers, he was a bishop in the early church, a guy named Ambrose in the year 400, he put it this way, our Lord was baptized, not that he might be cleansed by the waters, but to cleanse the waters.

That being purified by the flesh of Christ, who knew no sin, the waters might now possess the power of peace for us instead of judgment. Now for us, baptism is purification because for him, he was baptized unto death.

Now how? How is he able to do this? Well, we get it at the very end of the passage. The Holy Spirit descends, the voice comes from heaven, you are my beloved son.

The text literally says, you are the son, my delight, my beloved, my agape. You are the son, I don't know why they take the die out because it's a power.

[17 : 09] You are the son, you are my beloved. How is he able to do this? Because he is the son, he is the God man. He's him who absorbs sin but never acted sin.

It's saying that you are the son and you are my pleasure. That's how he's able to do it. There's one of the greatest films in the 20th century is The Elephant Man.

Many of you have seen The Elephant Man, I think. Literature and film have so much to teach us. Stories have so much to teach us about the real world.

We learn so much through stories, through absorbing ourselves into stories and learning through characters. That's why Jesus teaches through parables. That's why most of the Bible is written as narrative.

This is one of the great stories that has so much to tell us. It's The Elephant Man, it's about a man named Joseph Merrick. He was a late 19th century true story and he had a disease, I'm not sure exactly what the disease is called, but he was absolutely engrossed in tumors all over his body.

[18 : 24] He was abandoned by his parents and literally given over to what was called a freak show at the time, a traveling freak show or circus that showed people who were extremely strange.

There's an enlightened Englishman, a doctor named Frederick Weber. He's played by Anthony Hopkins in the film and he rescues Joseph Merrick from the situation.

He teaches him how to speak. Joseph has never known how to speak. He's 26 years old I think when Hopkins gets him. He teaches him how to talk. He gives him a place to live in a hospital.

The climax of the movie is the most moving of scenes in all the film. He invites him to his home to have tea, afternoon tea like all of you do all the time.

This man has never been invited into a home before, never subfoot in a home. He's certainly never been invited to tea. It's Anthony Hopkins and the woman that plays his wife are there and they're discussing and Joseph Merrick, the elephant man, shows Hopkins a picture of his mother.

[19 : 37] He says, I have a picture of my mother. Do you want to see it? I'm going to say, yeah, I want to see it. He was interested. He was a doctor. He wanted to know if his mother was also diseased like him and he sees she wasn't.

She was completely normal and she was a beautiful woman. This is what Merrick, the elephant man, says. I must have been a great disappointment to her.

If only I could find her now. If only she could see me as I am now with such lovely friends. Maybe if she could see me, she would want me.

Maybe she would delight in me. I tried so hard to be good for her. Now here's the gospel of Jesus' baptism.

Jesus' substitution for our sins is indeed legal. In other words, it's for forgiveness. It's that we're guilty before God and he's saying in his baptism, he's pronouncing, my ministry will be a ministry of substitution for your sins and it's legal.

[20 : 37] It's justification as we call it in theology. But it's not just legal. If you describe salvation, if you describe the gospel as just being forgiveness of sins, the legal issue that we have with God, then you'll miss something.

And that's this. What Jesus is offering in his substitution is exactly what Joseph Merrick so longed for. He wanted his mother to find him and to say, I want you.

And we don't need Freud. We don't need Freud to tell us why that happens. We all want to be wanted and delighted in by our father, by our mother, by our parents.

And that's because we were made by a heavenly father who said, you will never be happy until I say yes to you. Until I don't just say forgiven, I say son.

I say daughter. That's more than forgiveness. That's ownership. That's being his child. You see, Joseph Merrick wanted that more than any of us will ever know what it means to want that.

[21 : 39] He suffered unlike any of us will ever suffer. But the answer that he was looking for is that Jesus' substitution is about more than just legal forgiveness.

You see, when he looks at the son, the father, and says, you are my delight, Jesus' baptism is the pronouncement that he came to say that to you too.

He came to say son, daughter, come and eat at my table. You are my delight. You see, the gospel is a rescue mission. It's not just legal.

He came because he loved us so much. He came to take the world back to himself. This is how much he loves. He loved so much that he killed his son to get us.

This is the gospel of Jesus' baptism. You see, now that was 90% of our homily. Now we have 10% left. 10% that we have left is just simply to say for 2017, for this new year, that this gospel of baptism is also an example to us.

[22 : 46] Because this is the baptism of repentance that John told the people to do. Our baptism also is a sign of repentance, a sign of needing cleansing.

Our confession tells us that every time we see a baptism, we are to remember and recall our own baptisms and reflect on what it means. Our baptism means that we go under the water of purification because he went under the water of judgment for us.

Now that means that for 2017, the example that's being offered to us here, there's many, but just to highlight one, is we need repentance. The beauty of repentance is this, no matter if you're a Christian or not a Christian today, no matter if you've said no to the claims of Jesus Christ your entire life up to this point, or if you've been a Christian for 75 years, you need repentance.

The Bible wants Christians to confess all the time to repent of their sins and grow, and the Bible says, repent and believe. Repentance is the watchword for everybody from this passage, the example.

Repentance is hard for two reasons. One, because repentance forces you to say, I know I'm unclean. I know I don't have it together.

[24 : 03] I know I need something outside of me. And that's not easy. And Christianity's not easy. This isn't a sales pitch. The second reason that it's hard, even more, is because just like this was the inauguration of Jesus' ministry, and immediately he was driven into the desert, tempted by Satan, attacked, hated, so baptism and repentance, for us repentance, is an inauguration of your

ministry.

And ministry is a life of conflict. It's a fight. It's a conflict with yourself, with your own sin. It's a conflict with the cursed world, and it's a conflict with Satan.

The Bible tells us in the very next chapter. It's a conflict unto peace. So repentance is tough. You have to say, I'm not clean, and I'm ready to enter into this fight, the fight of ministry.

And that's what repentance is calling us to. And that's the example of Jesus' baptism. That's exactly what he did. Here's the beauty of it, though. The beauty of it Jesus taught about to close with this in the Lord's Prayer.

In chapter 7, Jesus, of course, taught his disciples and all of us to pray the Lord's Prayer. But a lot of New Testament scholars will say that when you say the Lord's Prayer, our Father, and you get to the point where you say, give us today our daily bread.

[25 : 33] Sometimes the text says this day. You can say today, literally. That actually the purpose is that the word today is implied throughout the rest of the petitions. A lot of New Testament scholars have kind of come to realize this now.

So we say, give us today our daily bread. Give us, oh Lord, today our daily bread. Give us when, today, of our debts.

As we forgive others, when, today, of their debts. You see the point? Forgive us today. The point is that in the Lord's Prayer is built this promise.

Yesterday's sins are for yesterday. All the things that you did and didn't do in 2016 are for 2016.

The beauty of Jesus' gospel and of repentance is that yesterday is yesterday, and today we pray our Father, today, give us forgiveness.

Give us repentance. Give us our food. Lead us not today into temptation. 2017 is a new today. The sins of yesterday are yesterday's sins.

[26 : 39] And that's the beauty of Jesus' gospel. That's the beauty of repentance. To quote Dumbledore. It's always good to quote Dumbledore. There's always help for those who ask it.

And there's, to quote the gospel, there's always forgiveness when we repent because this man went under the water of judgment so that we might have the waters of life.

Let's pray. Father, we ask, oh Lord, that you would break our hearts this morning of our sin, that you would lead us unto the path of repentance, the life of repentance, that we might grow and grow, that we might believe, and that we might become holy because this is what you ask of us.

And we pray that that would be so true of 2017 in a way it wasn't true for us in 2016. Lord, we want to be more and better and holier. We want to believe. We want to, we want to do so much this year that we didn't do last year.

And so we ask by your spirit that you would give us the grace. And so we pray this now in Jesus' name. Amen.