

*9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."*

How often do you think about your baptism? If you said, “every day,” I applaud you. I also would say that you are in the minority of Christians—I may be wrong, and I hope I am—but I would guess that the majority of Jesus’ followers don’t dwell on their baptism a whole lot. That’s a shame. It’s like standing next to a limitless supply of energy and never plugging in. In a very real sense, to forget our baptism is to forget who we are.

But it is understandable, if you’re like me and you were baptized as a baby. How can we think about and dwell on something that we don’t remember? It’s not a memory I can access. For that reason, I think those who were baptized as babies may have a twinge of ‘sanctified jealousy’ for those who are baptized later in life, because it is an experience they can remember. That works both ways, though. Those who are baptized later in life may have a twinge of ‘sanctified jealousy’ towards those who have been a part of the family for so long. The point is, baptism is extremely important and deserves more thought and reflection than we usually give it. Baptism is a powerful way that God lays claim to us, whether we remember the event or not. An adopted child is adopted whether or not they remember the adoption process. They live in the results of that adoption daily: they have a home, they have parents, their needs are met, and so on. In the same way, a baptized person is adopted whether or not they remember the baptism. They live in the results of that baptism daily: they have a home with God and possess a living faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. Baptism matters because it establishes our identity. You are no longer a free agent. There’s no flying solo for you. You have been connected to Jesus through baptism. A powerful link has been forged between you and Jesus. He shares everything with you. His suffering and death. His resurrection and victorious life. Baptism creates this bond. We need to dust off the font and dwell on what God did to us there.

We have that opportunity today as we hear of Jesus’ own baptism. Now there is always the potential for confusion when we talk about Jesus’ baptism. Some might ask, “Why did Jesus need to be baptized?” If, as we believe, Jesus was the sinless Son of God, then why would he be on the receiving end of a sacrament that provides forgiveness of sins? The answer is found in the very purpose for which Jesus became one of us. Jesus did not need to be forgiven, but in His baptism, Jesus wades into the water of our sin. He gets covered with our dirt. He begins his work of doing things he didn’t have to do for people like us, who couldn’t do them. In the waters of the Jordan River, Jesus builds a reservoir of life, holding innumerable gallons of forgiveness of sins and rescue from death. Those precious gifts will flow to all who are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Jesus needs to be baptized, not for himself, but for us, so that the channel can be dug and the connection can be made from his life to yours.

Mark records the vivid detail that awaited Jesus when he came up out of the water. He saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove. These things also happen

to the baptized. For the truth is, were it not for Jesus and His willingness to do things he didn't have to do, heaven would not be open to us. The doors would be shut and the gates locked. We would live the darkened lives of the self-absorbed and self-serving. If we had any thought of a heavenly life after this one, we would deceive ourselves into thinking we earned it.

But thanks be to God in Christ, we are free from such a hopeless outlook! When you were baptized, heaven was torn open to you and the gates were flung wide. A cord of life was tied around you—and at the other end is your resurrected, living Lord. You and I live in a finite world—a world where things fall apart, break down, and die. But in Christ, you are infinite with Him. There is much trouble, sickness, death, and heartache in this finite world—more than enough to go around. But the baptized Christian endures all these things with the promise that you will outlast them all. You will live beyond these problems. In your baptismal connection to Jesus you will survive even the annihilation of this world to continue on with Him forever. This promise is made to all baptized Christians. There is more for you beyond this present life and baptism into Jesus seals it.

Also, at Jesus' baptism, he saw the Spirit descending like a dove. This too happens to the baptized. The Holy Spirit enters a spiritually dead person and begins generating life—which is to say that he creates faith. This is an element of baptism that must not be overlooked. We need the Holy Spirit. We cannot believe in or appreciate, much less love God without the Spirit's work in us. St. Paul writes, "No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12: 3) and St. Peter offered the solution to that problem in his Pentecost proclamation: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." We cannot trust in Jesus without the Holy Spirit. So God provides us with His Holy Spirit through the simple action of baptism. He keeps on doing what we could not do to give us what we could not earn.

The baptismal connection that you have with Jesus has been likened to the umbilical cord that connects a mother and child in the womb. Of course, we know that a mother supplies nutrients and oxygen to her child through that cord in a continuous flow, things that keep the child alive and cause growth. What you may not think of immediately is the fact that the child sends something back through the cord as well. The baby sends back poisonous wastes, and the mother eliminates them for her child.

Baptism is that connecting cord between Jesus and you. Through God's extraordinary umbilical, baptismal connection, all the wastes of your sins flow continuously to Jesus and are removed forever by his shed blood—He's absorbed all your poisonous sins into his body. In return, Jesus' life-giving strength and perfection flow continuously to you. His life is always being renewed in you! And since you are connected with Christ Jesus in this way, you stand with Him as the Father says: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." The words apply to Jesus, and through Him, they apply to you, too. You are God's beloved child. He is well pleased with you. He says, "You are mine." This is who you are. Beloved of God.