

Luke 3:21-22

How is it possible to travel thirty years in one day? And yet, we just did. Yesterday was Epiphany...January 6—the day in the Church Year when we celebrate the visit by the Magi. Today is the Baptism of our Lord. Yesterday Jesus was an infant in Bethlehem. Today He is thirty years-old as He stands in the waters of the Jordan River. Thirty years in one day! That's faster than dog years.

Now it's not like nothing happened in between. Jesus lived every day of those thirty years. We're told about one incident...when He was twelve at the Temple in Jerusalem. But apart from that the Scriptures are silent. The next time we see Jesus He is standing on the banks of the Jordan.

If books had been written about Him—"Jesus, The Early Years"... "Jesus, The Teenager"—we might want to sit down to read them, but they really wouldn't do much for us. They'd be a little boring. He was a normal boy, only without sin. Now His days as an infant...they were exciting! King Herod tried to kill Him. He tricked the Magi to discover where He was and then he sent his soldiers with their swords. They killed all the baby boys in Bethlehem, but Jesus escaped to Egypt. Now that's a book! That makes for some interesting reading. We like books with happy endings. We're saddened by the deaths of the Bethlehem infants, but we're glad that Jesus escaped.

It's a little puzzling, however, that thirty years later (just one day for us) this same Jesus who escaped certain death, goes to the Jordan River to begin the process of dying our death. He doesn't go there to be forgiven. Jesus enters the waters to begin His journey to the cross. And this time there is no escape.

His baptism made Him a marked Man. Those waters did not cleanse Him—they marked Him in red. He now became the target for His Father's wrath. Not just a "decoy" to trick His Father into punishing Him instead of us...rather, when Jesus went into the waters, He came out wet with sin—your sin and mine. He now was officially and legally the only sinner on the face of the whole earth. For He who never had an evil thought, said a wicked word, or committed a wrong deed is "the Sinner" in the eyes of His Father. And what this means for you is that it is safe for you to stand in your baptism. For as you stand there in Christ and with Christ, you escape the wrath of God and certain death.

Remember Noah? Even after it stopped raining he had to remain in the ark because the floodwaters were everywhere. It wasn't safe to come out yet. He let out a raven, but that didn't tell him a whole lot. He let out a dove and it returned to him in the ark. He let it out again, and again it returned—this time with a fresh olive leaf in its mouth. A third time Noah let out the dove, and we're told in Genesis 8 that "it did not return to him." And so Noah and his family knew that it was safe to go out and stand upon the earth.

Today in hearing about Jesus' baptism we see the return of that dove. After all these years the dove comes back, not to the ark, but to the Jordan River where Jesus is standing. As He was being baptized..."the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove." And that means for you, my friend, that it is safe for you to come out. The destruction is over. The floodwaters are gone. Everything is now safe for you—not because there never was any danger, but because Jesus has made it safe for you.

The floodwaters in Noah's day destroyed all wickedness on the earth. That's why Jesus entered the waters of the Jordan for you. He stood there in His baptism so that your wickedness and mine would fall upon Him; so that He would face the rushing flood of His Father's wrath in your place; so that God would unleash all His destructive forces on Him and not on you.

That's why Jesus was baptized—not for His sake but for yours; so that you can stand in safety with Him in your baptism. There is no place else where it is safe to stand. If you do not stand with Christ, you are in danger. If you go through the year 2007 apart from His Word and Sacraments, you are in danger. However, in Christ and with Christ, you are safe. The dove has returned. He has descended upon Jesus. God's Word to you, therefore, is that you are safe with Jesus Christ.

You can come out from under your guilty conscience. God forgives you for Jesus' sake. Baptized into Christ, there is no guilt left for you. Jesus took it all. He was marked by His Father as the "Guilty One." You are safe with Christ. God is greater than your conscience and He says that you are forgiven.

You can come out from under your fears—fears of growing old, fears of poor health, fear of death. You are safe with Christ. He suffered, for you, the pains and consequences of your sin. God has no punishment left for you. Your sicknesses are not a result of His anger. He only means to draw you closer to Himself through them. Even your death cannot separate Him from you. The floodwaters are gone and Jesus, therefore, has prepared a fresh, new world for you—a life in heaven waiting for you after death. You are safe with Christ now in this life, and you are safe with Him in death.

When Noah and his family left the ark they made an altar to offer a sacrifice to God. As you come to God's altar today, you will walk by the baptismal font. This is good, for it reminds you why you are able to stand here in the presence of God. You are baptized. The same dove who came upon Jesus in the Jordan has come to you in your baptism. God's Holy Spirit assures you that it is safe for you to approach God's altar. It is safe for you to receive your Lord's body and blood because He was sacrificed for you. You can come out of your pew with confidence. You can eat this holy meal with joy and hope. Here is Christ for you. The same Christ who stood in Jordan's waters...the same Christ who went to the cross to die for you...the same Christ who rose in triumph, is here for you so that you may live your life in Him and with Him; so that you may die in Him; and so that you may live forever with Him.

Whether you have one day left to live, or thirty years, or more—to God, your whole life He sees in one day—the day you were baptized into Christ. For that day He marked you, not as a target of His wrath, but as His forgiven child. He marked you with Christ's holiness. He marked you as one redeemed by Christ the Crucified.

And so this is who you are—one for whom the dove has returned. You can come out from under your old sinful ways and live your life in peace and joy for Jesus Christ, for He has lived and died for you. Amen.