

**Mark 1:9-11**

There was a time in our nation's history when, if you were traveling out to the great West, you traveled by train. It might have been slow compared with today's standards. It might not have been the safest way to travel—train robbers were not uncommon back then. But in general, a train would take you where you wanted to go.

Some of you have traveled by train. Unlike traveling by driving a car, in a train you are pretty much passive throughout the entire journey. You don't have to step on the accelerator pedal or steer through turns and bends in the road. The engine does all the work. It pulls you along as you sit back and enjoy the ride. With a train you always know where you are going, not just because you purchased a ticket to a certain destination, but also this—because riding on a train track, wherever the engine goes, you are bound to follow. You can be sleeping in one car, your spouse can be reading in another car, and your children can be eating in the dining car, but you will all end up in the same place because each car follows the engine along the track.

Now this may be a painfully simple analogy, but it works to teach us the meaning of our text for today. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River. This happened some 2,000 years ago. Every year in January we look at this story and every year we may think to ourselves, "What does His baptism have to do with me?" So Jesus was baptized. For one thing it happened so long ago. For another it happened half-a-world away. "What, therefore, is the significance and meaning for my life?"

Perhaps our train analogy will help answer this question. Jesus, like the train engine, was baptized so that when you and I join Him in those waters, like cars in a train where He goes, we are bound to follow. "Onward Christian Soldiers," we sing, "Marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before... Like a mighty army moves the church of God; brothers we are treading where the saints have trod." There is no other path for Christians to walk than the one Jesus has laid. Every saint before us, baptized into Christ, followed in His train. Where the engine goes, so goes the train.

The people of this sinful world are all running in different directions. But in your baptism God called you out of the world and joined you to Christ Jesus. As a member of His church; as part of His train you now have purpose and direction for your life. He goes before you and with you. The saints who have lived before us are not just distant memories; they are on the train with us. They have already entered their eternal rest ahead of us and we, too, shall follow them for we are united with them in baptism. Our children's children who follow after us will be, and are, on that same train with us as God joins them to the Savior in those sacred waters.

The track has been laid. The engine may be well ahead of us on the track. 2,000 years ahead of us Jesus entered the waters of baptism. But what happened to Him will happen to us. Where He goes, we will follow. In baptism we are joined to His train, and He is with us every part of the way.

Our text tells us that when Jesus was baptized the "heavens were opened." That's why Jesus, and not us, is the Head of this train. You and I could never bust through heaven's door. Our sins would keep us locked out forever. But when Jesus stepped into the waters

of the Jordan it says that the heavens were ripped open. Like dynamite blasting an opening for a train to go through a mountain in Colorado, and so a tunnel is made and the track is laid down, so Jesus blasted open the doors of heaven for you. And He put you on His train in your baptism so that what happened to Him happens to you. The heavens opened for Him, and so they open for you. It doesn't matter how many, and great and terrible are your sins. Heaven is open to you in Christ, for your baptism into Him has forgiven you. Your sins cannot keep you locked on the outside. Where Jesus goes, you shall follow.

Going through a tunnel can be a scary thing. Entering into the opening of a mountain we leave the sunshine behind and enter into darkness. But Jesus went that way ahead of us. He entered into the darkness of death on a cross. He died. He was placed into the darkness of a tomb. But at the end of the tunnel there is light. On the third day He rose from the dead. And so we can approach the day of our death with confidence. The saints before us all died trusting in Christ. So can we. We all enter the same tunnel. The track goes that way for each one of us. We leave the sunshine of this life behind. We are placed into a grave for awhile. But because Jesus busted through to the other side we, too, shall follow. We will not remain in the tunnel of death. Rather, that tunnel leads us into heaven's eternal light because Jesus opened heaven for you, and in baptism you are on His train. Where He goes, you shall follow.

Our text says that when Jesus was baptized the Spirit came upon Him. That same Spirit of God came to you in your baptism. Because of the Holy Spirit in your life, you trust in your Savior Jesus. You know Him who leads you on this train as He who loves you. You can safely and freely move from one car to another; from the sleeping car to the dining car to the sightseeing car. You can go to school in Augusta, and to work in Washington. You can eat your meals at home. You can lie down in your bed at night...not worried about where you are going. With the Holy Spirit on you, you live each day following Christ in His train. Though robbers attack you; though the great Robber, Satan, is out to assault you, the Holy Spirit keeps you safe with Christ in His train.

Jesus already faced that evil train robber for you. He defeated the devil on Calvary's cross. Satan may lurk near you. He may try to pull you away from Christ, but in Jesus' church you are safe. By regularly hearing His Word and receiving His body and blood, the Holy Spirit keeps you on Christ's train away from Satan's clutches. Remember your baptism. Not Satan, but God's Spirit lives in you. You can live without fear. You trust in Jesus.

Our text says that when Jesus was baptized the Father's voice called out, "You are My beloved Son." This happened also to you in your baptism. You are not on Jesus' train illegally. You did not sneak on only to now worry that you may be thrown off. You are God's child. Your baptism declares this to be certain. Your place, therefore, is on the train with Christ. He is God's Son leading you, and so you are God's sons and daughters who follow Him. Do we deserve a place on His train? No, not one of us. We all deserve to be tossed off into a great chasm. But your ticket is valid. Your baptism seals it as a guarantee. You belong with Christ on His train for you are His dear children.

Will every day be pleasant and peaceful as we ride together on this train? No, we endure hardships, worries, and troubles. We fight with the other passengers at times. We bicker and complain. But this is not Amtrak. This is Jesus' train...His church. There is forgiveness here—forgiveness for you. And so we don't give up hope. We don't jump off

the train. We all here at Christ Lutheran congregation, as we travel together, learn to get along with each other; to love and forgive each other, for you all are loved by your God; you are all forgiven by Him for Jesus' sake.

Train travel may not be very fast, but Jesus is taking us to where we want to go. Our baptism into Him makes this certain. I'm going to read the first and last verses of hymn 661, "The Son of God Goes Forth to War." You can follow with me if you like.

"The Son of God goes forth to war A kingly crown to gain. His blood-red banner streams afar; Who follows in His train? Who best can drink His cup of woe, Triumphant over pain, Who patient bears his cross below—He follows in His train.

A noble army, men and boys, The matron and the maid, Around the Savior's throne rejoice, In robes of light arrayed. They climbed the steep ascent of heav'n Through peril, toil, and pain. O God, to us may grace be giv'n To follow in their train." Amen.