

Matthew 3:13-17

When the angel Gabriel visited Mary and told her she would be the mother of God, Mary did not understand. Yet her lack of understanding did not prevent it from happening. The same is true of baptism. A baby has about as much understanding of baptism as Mary did that the Christ would be born from her. Yet the baby's lack of understanding does not in any way prevent God from doing His wonderful work through the waters of Holy Baptism. A lack of understanding did not prevent the Holy Spirit from conceiving the Christ within Mary. And also with us, Jesus comes to dwell within us through Holy Baptism despite the weakness and frailty of our human minds.

John, when he was baptizing, did not fully grasp what he was doing, for when Jesus came to be baptized by him, John tried to prevent it from happening. Jesus did not set John down and instruct him with a lecture on baptism. He simply told him to let it happen, and John obeyed. If baptism has to make sense before it is done, then none of us would be baptized, nor would John have baptized Jesus. Baptism is not about making sense. It's about faith in God's promise. It's about being given Jesus and His gifts, including faith, not through the power of our human minds, but through the power of God's Word at work through the water in the font.

Our minds struggle with comprehending our own baptism, let alone the baptism of our Lord. He who was without sin, stood in line with sinners to undergo baptism. But had Jesus not been baptized, Christmas would be stripped of its joy, there would be no point to the cross of Calvary, Easter would have no meaning, and your own baptism would be void and empty. Your baptism has meaning for you only because Jesus entered the waters of Holy Baptism to place in those waters the very gifts you receive from them.

Consider this analogy. If no money has been placed into your bank account, then you will not be able to withdraw any money from your account when you go to the bank. You can only make a withdrawal if money has first been deposited into your account. You and I have nothing of value to offer God. If our bank account with Him is to be filled with forgiveness, life, and salvation, it cannot come from us; it must come from Him. And so Jesus, out of mercy, went to the Jordan to be baptized by John; He went to the cross to suffer and die; He burst forth from the tomb on the third day. All this He did for you, to deposit for you the riches of heaven itself into your account.

And as you know, even a small infant can be given a bank account here on earth. You might have done this for your children, or had it done for you when you were born. An account was set up in your name and money was placed there for you. Just so, as God tells us in His Word, Jesus was baptized so that anyone, even infants, who are baptized into Him are given His gifts, because His gifts are for them also.

Human reason rejects all of this. Our minds from birth not only fail to understand baptism; they do not see the need for it. About a generation ago you may remember the catch phrase that was quite popular, "What would Jesus do?" There were many who wore WWJD bracelets. On the surface, this fad seemed harmless, even good and proper. But it was born not of God, but out of the weakness and frailty of human reason. Jesus is held up as example, not as Savior. Not that we shouldn't be Christ-like in our behavior. Clearly we should. But we daily fall short. We struggle with sin and give in to it so often. We don't need an example to follow as much as we need a Savior to forgive and rescue us from our sin. Had Jesus went to the waters of the Jordan as our example, there would be nothing in baptism for us to receive. If Jesus is our example, then He merely shows us how we can get right with God. And He simply shows us how to open heaven for ourselves.

We live in the State of Missouri--the "Show-Me State." And not just, "show me what you mean,"--"show me how to do it for myself." By nature everyone is born in this state. We are offended by the Gospel. We don't want God to become flesh to make us right with Him. Just give me a nudge in the right direction and show me what to do. We don't want a Savior who opens heaven for us when He undergoes baptism. We want to open heaven's door for ourselves by walking mostly in the right path.

Repent! This damnable thinking lives in the hearts and minds of everyone, including you and me. Repent and believe the promises of God. Jesus was baptized not to show you what to do, but because you need a Savior. And now you have one. Jesus went to the Jordan to be baptized by John not for His own sake, but for yours. What happened there, happened for you even if you and I do not fully grasp it with our frail minds. As He came up out of the water, heaven was opened, and the Father's voice, from heaven, said, "*This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.*" What this means for you is that through Jesus and because of Him, heaven is open to you, and your Heavenly Father is pleased with you. When you say, "I am baptized into Christ," this is the same as saying, "I have a place in heaven with Jesus."

The devil hates baptism for he knows its power and meaning. Through John, Satan tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized. Through Simon Peter, he tried to prevent Jesus from reaching the cross. Through Pilate's seal on the tomb, he tried to prevent Jesus' resurrection. But he could not stop any of these. Jesus did what He came to do. And also today. The devil tries to hinder the power of baptism. He uses human reason. He uses the weakness and frailty of our minds. He works to prevent Christian parents from bringing their infants to Jesus in baptism. And even when they do, he then works to convince them that a baptized baby does not need to be brought to Church and Sunday School.

But consider what God can do. Through Mary, God brought forth His Son despite her lack of understanding. Through cross and empty tomb, God accomplished your salvation despite the powers of darkness that tried to prevent it. Through Holy Baptism, God gave you a place in heaven with Jesus, forgiving you all your sins. He is not angry at you for your disobedience. He is pleased with you for Jesus' sake, because Jesus is your Savior. Your sins are forgiven in Him. If God can do all this, despite the power of the devil, despite our own weakness and frailty, and He has done all this for you--then why would He stop now and refuse to protect you from the power of sin and Satan? You are baptized into Christ. You are precious to Him. Nothing in your past, nothing in the coming year can separate you from His love. Rather than the catch phrase, "what would Jesus do?" let these words be the words you rise with every morning, and the words you end your day with every night: "I am baptized into Christ!" Amen.