

### **Matthew 3:13-17**

Twice, that we know of, John the Baptist refused to baptize. He did not baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees because they were unwilling to repent. And here in our text, John is unwilling to baptize Jesus because He has no sin of which to repent. The very idea causes John to shudder. “*I need to be baptized by You,*” he says, “*and do You come to me?*” But Jesus insists, and so John baptizes Him.

And it’s a good thing He does. Baptism is for sinners. And therefore, baptism is for Jesus. Not because He was a sinner, but because in being baptized, Jesus identified with sinners. For Him to be our Savior, He had to be baptized. Entering into our world was not enough. For then He would have been only our teacher, but not our Savior. He would have walked among us yet remained aloof from us. He would have had to teach us how to save ourselves from sin, death, and damnation. But in being baptized, Jesus is not teaching, but doing. He does not remain aloof but becomes one with us. Jesus enters the water to become the sinner for us.

You and I are told over and over to remember our baptism daily. In our minds, yes, but also physically with our hands, making the sign of the holy cross upon ourselves. And why wouldn’t we do this? We don’t despise either our baptism or the cross, do we? Baptism does not belong to a particular church denomination, nor does the cross. These holy things belong to the one church on earth, to all who are Christians.

Baptism and the cross go together because Jesus placed them together. By stepping into the water to be baptized, He was taking His first step toward the cross. This is why the Father said from heaven, “*This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.*” God the Father was pleased with His Son. He declared this at His baptism because Jesus there was embracing the cross upon which He would suffer and die for you and me, and for all sinners.

And so we hear in our text the words, “*the heavens were opened to (Jesus).*” Well of course, we think. Jesus is God. So of course, heaven is opened to Him. But now they are opened to Him also as man.

St. Matthew makes a point of telling us that not only did the Father speak, not only did the Holy Spirit descend, but also, at Jesus’ baptism, the heavens were opened to Him. And this means the heavens are opened to you. Not only can God enter heaven, so can man. So can you.

But only with Jesus. Our heads had better not get too big and puffed up. Matthew does not say the heavens are opened to us, but they are opened to Jesus. Sinners cannot enter heaven. Sin is not allowed there in God’s presence. He detests sin. He must turn away from sin. Which is why He turned away from His Son on the cross, for there Jesus became the sinner for us.

But this is why heaven is opened to you. Not because you have no sin, but because your sin is forgiven. This is what Jesus’ death and resurrection means. All sinners are declared forgiven. And because baptism and the cross belong together, in your baptism the cross of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins He won for all, is placed upon you and given to you.

Every day you live, therefore, no matter how challenging or painful, is lived in anticipation of heaven. Because you are a forgiven sinner – all of you are forgiven sinners – Jesus is your Righteousness, your Salvation, your Savior. And therefore, no sin you have ever done can keep you out of heaven, for you enter with Jesus.

Now I ask you, since all this is what your baptism means for you, why wouldn't you want to remember your baptism daily? Toward the end of her life, my mom suffered from Alzheimer's. She forgot if she was married. She forgot my name, although she remembered my face and my hugs. And so when she saw me, I reminded her of who I was, of who my dad, her husband was. I reminded her that he was a man who loved Jesus and was in heaven with his Savior. And I reminded her that she would be there too, and that I would follow her there one day. And in reminding her of all this, she always smiled with joy.

This is why we need to remember our baptism daily. Because we all have spiritual Alzheimer's. We forget, and we need to be reminded. And what a joy to remember that we have a Savior in Jesus; that we are baptized into Him who died and rose again for us; that heaven is opened to us, for we are forgiven sinners; and that we will be there one day because we will enter heaven with Jesus. Amen.