

**Matthew 3:13-17**

It probably took less than a minute to do. It took place half-a-world away nearly 2,000 years ago. Nonetheless, we Christians celebrate it with a special Sunday observance every single year—the Baptism of our Lord. There are those who wonder why it even happened in the first place. Jesus didn't need to be baptized; He is the "sinless One." And John tried to prevent Him, but Jesus was insistent. Was He teaching by example—like a mother tasting the medicine first so that her child will take it? Certainly Jesus wants us to be baptized, He even commands it. But He did not walk into the Jordan to show us what to do. Rather, like Moses, Jesus approached the waters so that through those waters you and I would be delivered from bondage.

Moses had a life in Midian. He lived there forty years. He had a wife and family. But God sent him to confront Pharaoh in Egypt, and to safely lead God's people out of their slavery. The only way out was through the waters of the Red Sea. Now anyone could see that there was no refuge in those waters. The Egyptians were in hot pursuit, but to walk into the Sea would have been foolish. And so God had Moses go to the water ahead of all the people, and He had Moses stretch out his hand, and God turned those waters into the path of escape. They opened for the Israelites so that they walked through to the other side. And when Pharaoh's army entered, the waters closed; they came crashing down upon them and drowned them all. God had delivered His people from their cruel bondage under Pharaoh, and He had used Moses to accomplish this deliverance.

As God had sent Moses, so He sent His Son to rescue us. We were born in Egypt, just as the Israelites were. Our "Egypt" was the slavery to our sins, and Satan was our "Pharaoh." It was his cruel intent to keep us for all eternity; to make us suffer, as Pharaoh caused the Israelites to suffer and moan with despair and sorrow. But our God had compassion for us. He sent our "Moses" to us, Jesus Christ, to confront Pharaoh for us, in our place. Not one of us could stand up to Satan, but Jesus stood up to him for you. He allowed Himself to be "stood up" from the ground on a cross, and there He dealt with Satan once and for all. He defeated Satan just as Moses had defeated Pharaoh. "It is finished!" He cried with His dying breath, and with His death Jesus conquered Satan for you.

And as Moses then led the Israelites to the waters of the Red Sea, so Jesus led you to the waters of Holy Baptism so that through those waters you would be delivered, and Satan, sin, and death would be drowned and buried. There are those who ridicule baptism. "There is no safety in those waters," they claim. "They can do nothing for you." And that's how it looked, at first, to the Israelites, but through Moses, God turned the Red Sea waters into the way of escape, the way of deliverance, the path of life. And that is what Jesus has done for you. He approached the waters of baptism first, and He entered those waters at the Jordan River; and as He did, St. Matthew tells us that "the heavens were opened," just as the Red Sea was opened. And as Moses led God's people through those waters to life, so in Holy Baptism Jesus gives you eternal life in heaven.

Baptism is your deliverance from the bonds of your sins. Your baptism is the death of your death, and the defeat of Satan's power over you. Just as the Israelites rejoiced in the Lord when they safely arrived on the other side of the Red Sea, so you and I can rejoice every day for what God has done for us in baptism.

And so now what? Here we are on the other side of baptism. We've been there and done that. What's next? What was next for the Israelites was to grumble and complain. What was next for them was to erect a golden calf and worship it. What was next was to reject God's leading and selfishly desire to return to their way of life in Egypt.

What's next for us? Having been baptized...having been delivered from Satan's power... having been released from the bondage and curse of our sin, are we so very different from God's people of long ago? Are we content with the blessings God gives us? Are we thrilled to hear His words and obey His commandments? Are we satisfied to have Him lead us through His servants today?

As for me, I would have fit in perfectly with God's people then, because I am just like them. What about you? Are you so different from me? Don't we grumble and complain as they did under Moses? Don't we worship our idols today: sports, leisure, money, and family? Don't we want to lead ourselves through life? And don't we have the daily desire, as they did, to return to a life of sin? It seems as though the Israelites did not remember, too well, their baptism in the Red Sea waters. And it seems as though you and I also have a very poor memory.

God, however, does not. He remembers that you are His baptized child. He remembers, therefore, your sins no more. He remembers that His words to Jesus at His baptism are also His words to you: You are My son, (My daughter) whom I love; with you I am well pleased. God remembers what Jesus has done for you, and that is why He is pleased with you. He remembers His holy life for you; His sufferings, death, and resurrection for you. God is pleased with you not because of what you do for Him, but because by faith in Holy Baptism, you have put on Christ. God is pleased to forgive you because of Jesus. God is pleased to give you His Holy Spirit just as He gave Him to Jesus in His baptism. God is pleased to give you a place in heaven with Him, and it's all because of what Jesus has done for you.

What's next, therefore? What's next is always God's grace and forgiveness. Is Satan tempting you to forsake God's leading? Repent...you are baptized into Christ Jesus; what's next for you is His grace and forgiveness. Have you grumbled about the blessings God has not given you? Not enough money, not enough good health, not enough of what He gives? Repent...you are God's baptized child; what He gives you right here and now is His grace and forgiveness.

The simple truth is that it does not matter what you have done—your sins are not going to change what's next for you. What's next is that God forgives you in Christ. Don't keep leading a life of sin. Stop your desire to return to Egypt. God is leading you in the way of life. That way of life is your baptism into Christ. That life never ends. That's why God's grace and forgiveness is for you with every step you take. He will never turn away from you—do not turn back from following Him. You are His baptized, forgiven child... therefore, in Christ you can resist sin in your life and live for Jesus, because it is He who lives within you.

What's next for us? Will all of us remain healthy in 2008? Will all of us have enough money in the bank to pay the bills? Will all of us still be living next year at this time? We don't know what's next in our path through life, but we do know that our path is life in

Jesus Christ. You are baptized into Him. You can live each day that God gives you without worry, without fear. What's next for you, dear friend, for Jesus' sake, is always grace and forgiveness. Amen.