

The Baptism of Our Lord (1/10/10 – *Holy Baptism – Christ’s and Yours*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Our Holy Scriptures appointed for this day are full of contrasts ... perhaps even seeming contradictions. In the *Old Testament Lesson* we heard these mild contrasts – east and west, north and south, water and fire. Then we get into some deeper ones – enslavement and freedom, exhortation and good news, death and life, burial and resurrection, sin and grace, Spirit and body, the Man Jesus and the beloved Son of God. Today on this *First Sunday after the Epiphany of Our Lord* ... on which we celebrate *The Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ* ... we look at these contrasts and seeming contradictions under the title: *Holy Baptism – Christ’s and Yours*.

St. Paul describes us – yes even us believers – as having once been *enslaved to sin* [ROM 6.6]. Those are serious words ... a serious condemnation – one we don’t really like to hear. Oh, sure, we might **fall** into sin now and again – be tempted ... let our guard down ... trip and stumble and fall in a moment of weakness. It seems way too harsh to accuse our natural flesh of having been *enslaved to sin* ... ever! And yet, that is the truth ... the God-given and therefore irrefutable truth. Natural reason will never arrive at that conclusion – much less admit it. If we talk to people on the street ... even many in the Church ... most would deny such enslavement. Like the Pharisees of Jesus’ time – recorded in another place of Scripture [JN 8] – most would claim to have **never** been enslaved to anything or anyone. And even the most heinous of sins – the killing of completely defenseless, as-yet-unborn infants by abortion – is portrayed by too many parts of the sinful world as being “pro-choice.” “I am free to choose what to do with my body ... free, I tell you.” But it is really only enslavement – enslavement to sin (the sins of immorality and murder ... the sins of failing to recognize God as the One Who created and formed us and then redeemed us ... making us **HIS** [ISA 43.1]) ... enslavement to the sinful flesh ... enslavement to the world and the devil ... enslavement to death.

And even after we are baptized and made believers in Christ – even now ... and until we are taken out of this life and transfigured into glory – we struggle with this problem. We are no longer slaves to sin – that is also the God-given and therefore irrefutable truth. But sometimes it sure doesn’t look like we’ve been freed from that slavery – does it? – at least when we’re honest with ourselves and see ourselves for who we are and what we do ... even now as believers. Through Baptism you have been freed from sin – you are no longer under its death-grip. And yet you keep falling into sin. And sometimes, for a while, your sinful flesh

that is still hanging on to you succeeds in fooling you into thinking that your sin is **not** a problem ... **not** something you have to fight tooth and nail against. In fact, in the worst scenario, your sinful flesh succeeds for a time in tricking you into thinking that your sin is actually a **good** thing – because where sin increases, grace super-abounds (as Paul mentions a few verses before our text [ROM 5.20]).

That's the blasphemous thinking of the sinful flesh that Paul is dealing with in our *Epistle*. And that's part of our sin problem as well. Oh, we probably don't think it quite that way. Certainly would never **say** that. But it is the way we act. "It's no big deal if I sin," we seem to say by our repeated sinning, "there is plenty more grace, mercy, and forgiveness from God." And we don't act that way for most of our sins – just the ones that are the hardest for us to give up ... the ones our flesh really love ... the ones that are so ingrained in us that we've given up struggling against them ... given up hope – like the nation of Israel would feel after their Babylonian exile.

But to unfaithful, desperate souls comes the good and gracious Word of our ever faithful LORD – *He Who created you ... He Who formed you* – saying: *Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.* [ISA 43.1-3a]

Here is the antidote for your weak and ever-falling sinful flesh – the redemption of God your Savior. Here is sure and certain hope for all of us who are struck down and weary by the constant battling against our own sinfulness – the assurance given by God Himself by His Holy Word that you are His ... that He has called you by Name ... that He has redeemed you and applied that redemption to you personally in your Holy Baptism ... where God was with you as you passed through the waters to which He attaches His Word and promises.

Isaiah reminded Israel that God had given Egypt as their ransom – delivering His people from their bondage in Egypt when He sent the angel of death to smite all the first-born sons of the unbelieving and idolatrous Egyptians. *Because you are precious in My eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life.* But where God once gave *men* and *peoples*, He has now given one Man – Jesus. And yet this Man the Father declares to be His beloved Son with Whom He is well pleased as the Man Jesus prays, standing in the waters of the Jordan at His Baptism. And to top off that seeming

contradiction of this scene – namely, that this Man can be God – the Holy Spirit Himself descends in bodily form, like a dove. The eternal Son of God is a mortal Man being baptized like thousands of sinners. The eternal Holy Spirit is like a dove. And then the Father speaks with a voice from heaven, saying: ***You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.*** [LK 3.22]

But if we look beyond these seeming contradicts – and I have been saying *seeming* because they are **not**, indeed, contradictions ... just contrary to the way our finite, mortal flesh would normally think of the infinite, immortal, and unchanging God – and contemplate exactly what is going on here in this scene of *The Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, what we see is a most blessed Epiphany of our Triune God coming to us where we are and beginning the work of our salvation. For here, by the Holy Spirit's anointing and the Father's thunderous confirmation, Jesus is revealed as the Christ of God – the Anointed One of God – ordained and installed as Prophet, Priest, and King of the Kingdom of God. From this moment Jesus the Son of God will begin His prophetic ministry of proclaiming His Word of Law and Gospel, repentance and faith, sin and grace, condemnation and forgiveness, bondage and redemption, death and life. From this moment Jesus the Son of God will begin His priestly ministry of interceding on behalf of a sinful world ... culminating with His offering of Himself, the Lamb of God, as the once-for-all sacrifice for all sins upon the altar of His Cross. From this moment Jesus the Son of God will proclaim and teach, heal and pray, and do mighty works of righteousness until He is crowned as King with a diadem of thorns at His bloody inauguration on Good Friday.

Here in the waters of the Jordan, coming with the crowd of sinners who hear John's preaching of a baptism of repentance into the forgiveness of sin, your Lord and God shoulders the burden of your sins and in exchange fills the waters of your Baptism with the forgiveness, life, and salvation He will work and win for you on the Cross. He Who knew no sin becomes sin for you. He Who is truly free from sin enslaves Himself to your sin so that He might redeem and free you from your bondage to sin, death, and devil. He Who cannot die, because He is the eternal Son of God, will die in your stead so that you might have eternal life with Him in heaven. And Christ your Lord and Savior does this because you are precious in His eyes ... because, despite your completely dishonorable sinfulness, He wishes to honor you before all the world and claim you as His own ... because, despite the **un**loveliness of your sin, He loves you. For these reasons – which seem truly contradictory – Jesus sets Himself as the Exchange for your life.

And how do you know that all these benefits of Christ are your own? By your

own Holy Baptism! In your Baptism the Holy Spirit descended upon you – though not in visible, bodily form, like a dove. In your Baptism the Holy Spirit came with the Word – through which He constantly comes to – and sealed you as belonging to the eternal, Triune God. To **you** God has said, ***Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine.*** God was with **you** as you passed through the waters of Baptism. **You** are precious in God's eyes, honored and loved – God sealed it in your Holy Baptism ... as He was burying you in a death like Christ's and raising you up to a new, forgiven, eternal life in a resurrection like Christ's. To **you** the heavens are now open ... and to **you** the Father also says, ***You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased.*** And this all because of Christ!

In the Name of the FATHER and of the + SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]