

Ps 29; Is 42:1-9; Ac 10:34-43; Mt 3:13-17
01-08-17 – Jesus Is the Covenant
Baptism of the Lord Sunday

“After the Baptism of his baby brother in church, little Denis sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car. His father asked him three times what was wrong. Finally, Denis replied, 'That priest said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, but I want to stay with you guys.'”
(cleanchristianjokes.html)

Jesus was brought into the family of God when he was only eight days old. Mary and Joseph took Him to the temple where he was circumcised. In the day, that religious act was a sign that He belonged to the nation of Israel and to God. So, when He later went down to the Jordan River where John was baptizing the crowds, He was inaugurating a new way – the way of entering the fellowship of God – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. He was about thirty years old at that time. If there ever was a person who did **not** need to be baptized it was Jesus!

John knew this. He tried to stop Him from being baptized, “But Jesus insisted. ‘Do it. God’s work, putting things right all these centuries, is coming together right now in this baptism.’ So, John did it.” (Mt 3:15)

As usual, Jesus did not just tell His followers what to do – He lived it out before them in His own obedience to His heavenly Father. And this act of surrender to God’s will brought about a supernatural phenomenon. A dove appeared, fluttered down and rested on Jesus. Then, a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son whom I dearly love; I find happiness in Him.” (Mt 3:17 CEB) So, the church (that’s you and me) has been obedient to this act of receiving baptism. The blessing of the water, the act of immersion, pouring or sprinkling is performed by an anointed minister of the Gospel, and the confirmand rises from the waters of chaos into the household of God. We say it is “an outward sign of an inward grace.” Something must have already taken place in order for the congregation and the leader to perform this Service of Holy Baptism. More about this in a moment.

We search the Old Testament to learn the great story of God gathering a people for Himself – the saga of men and women who believed God and who heard God’s Word. We have a gem among these Scriptures that we call the Servant Songs – or the Song of the Suffering Servant. These passages are a glimpse of Jesus before He took on human flesh. His character and His deeds are previewed by the prophets all along the way in the history of God’s people. One of my favorite prophets, Isaiah, wrote down these songs for us.

You may already be aware of these beautiful hymns, but here are references to take you to them. There are four songs, some say five. The first we heard read aloud this morning: Is 42:1-9. The others are found in Is 49, 50, 52-53, and perhaps 61:1-3. Sixty-one does not use the word “servant.”

The character of Jesus Christ is outlined in the Servant Song. Listen:

“Take a good look at my servant.

I’m backing him to the hilt.

He’s the one I chose,

and I couldn’t be more pleased with him.

I've bathed him with my Spirit, my life.

He'll set everything right among the nations.

*He won't call attention to what he does
with loud speeches or gaudy parades.*

*He won't brush aside the bruised and the hurt
and he won't disregard the small and
insignificant,*

but he'll steadily and firmly set things right.

*He won't tire out and quit. He won't be stopped
until he's finished his work—to set things right
on earth. (Is 42:1-4 MSG)*

Just as the Prophet Zechariah said, “*Not by might
nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord.*”

(4:6) We look for these qualities in a leader. We pray to grow in these ways ourselves, don't we? When we are at our best, we work for peace with justice in the world we live in here and now. No quitting, no excuses.

What we draw from the Gospel passage (Mk 1:9-11, Lk 3:21-22, Jn 1:31-34) this morning is that Jesus insisted on being baptized by his cousin, John. It was an outward sign of His inward grace. He established the path for all who would be part of Him. For, He is the Covenant. His body, His

blood, His Spirit – these are our way of New Life. We partake of Him, we follow Him – we praise and worship Him. Jesus. Even saying His name aloud is an act of our will being conformed to His will – the very will of God.

When we hear the Apostle Peter speaking this morning, we must think back to where he was and who he was with. He is presenting the Gospel of Jesus to a household of Gentile God-fearers. The centurion Cornelius is a local commander in the Roman army at Caesarea. So, his home was essentially the headquarters of the garrison. The whole force of Roman military stationed there would have been only about 3,000 soldiers.

This moment of Peter's visit to Cornelius' house is the first Gentile Baptism into Jesus Christ recorded since John was baptizing in the Jordan. While Peter spoke this brief message, the Holy Spirit descended upon the place and all those who had heard the Word began to praise God and to speak in tongues. This is an important moment for us today. The Holy Spirit is just as faithful here as He was there and everywhere. It

is not the preacher, it is the message. And the outcome of such anointing is hearts and minds changed by faith in Jesus. This is the inward grace – work accomplished by the Savior Himself among those gathered in His name. The Covenant is Jesus.

We call Holy Baptism, along with Holy Communion, the sacraments of the church. These are times of corporate acknowledgement and celebration of Immanuel – God with us. That great promise of God is fulfilled in Jesus. He is our Covenant. Listen to the Servant Song:
“I am the Lord, I have called You in righteousness,
I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You,
And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people,
As a light to the nations,
To open blind eyes,
To bring out prisoners from the dungeon
And those who dwell in darkness from the prison.” (Is 42:6, 7)
That prison is sin.
Jesus is our washing, our assurance, our Leader,
our Covenant. Amen.