

Grace to you and peace from God our Father
and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is
found in the Gospel according to Saint John the
first chapter beginning at the nineteenth verse,
and we read in Jesus' name:

*Now this is the testimony of John, when the
Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem
to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ He confessed,
and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the
Christ." ²¹ And they asked him, "What then?
Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are
you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." ²²
Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we
may give an answer to those who sent us?
What do you say about yourself?" ²³ He said:
"I am the voice of one crying in the
wilderness: "Make straight the way of the
LORD,"' as the prophet Isaiah said." ²⁴ Now
those who were sent were from the Pharisees.
²⁵ And they asked him, saying, "Why then do
you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor
Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶ John answered*

*them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there
stands One among you whom you do not
know. ²⁷ "It is He who, coming after me, is
preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am
not worthy to loose." ²⁸ These things were
done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where
John was baptizing.*

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and
therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that
You would increase our faith through them.
Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

Three weeks ago we started a new church year.
We did it to little fanfare, there was not a ball
that was dropped, there was not countdown,
there was not even a cool pair of glasses with
the year as the holes to look through; yet, we
did start a new church year. And over the
course of this church year we have looked at
messengers of Christ, those would would come
before Christ, not only for His first Advent, but
also for His second Advent.

Three weeks ago we examined the word of God as a messenger; two weeks ago we looked at the natural signs and wonders that God has placed all around us; last week we heard from some of the prophets who were forerunners of Christ; and now this week we have our final ‘messenger of Christ:’ Baptism. Yes, not only the baptism of John, but even more prevalent for us, the baptism from our God. Dear friends in Christ, as we enter into our last Sunday of Advent for this year, as we examine our last text proclaiming Christ’s first coming for this year, let us remember that we are *baptized into Christ*.

As we look at our text for today, we can see a rather interesting scene unfolding: Pharisees are coming to John to persuade him to join them. You can see it can’t you? The Pharisees, the Jews of Jews, are coming to a man of relative obscurity and they are asking him if he is the Messiah. Though the Pharisees are not truly looking for a Messiah, or they would’ve clung to Christ, they are trying to curry favor with John to not only get him on their side but to get ahold of those who were following him.

They do this rather nicely don’t they? Are you the Messiah? Well are you Elijah then? Well are you the prophet then? Every time lessening who John might be... but then that last question comes out: Who are you... what do you say of yourself?” Wow what an open ended chance for John to be anything he wanted to be. As Martin Luther preached on this text: “they did not offer him a present, nor ordinary glory, but the highest glory of all, the kingdom and all authority, being ready to accept him as the Christ... and lastly, not knowing of any more honors, they left him to choose, as to who or what he wished to be regarded, for they greatly desired to do him homage.” John could have had anything and still he chose to proclaim the truth: I am not the Messiah.

I wonder what we would’ve done in that situation. Would we have been so bold as John so as to refuse the “keys to the kingdom” when asked who or what we wanted to be? I mean what would you do if you had a chance to move to a new city/state and completely remake yourself? Having just come out of college, I

know that is a time when many people try to reinvent themselves. They make new friends, try new things, learn to like new experiences.

I know that also when people hit the age or time of retirement they have a very difficult time and really go through an adjustment period. They have spent their “entire” life working and getting so much of their meaning from their job, that when they retire they don’t know who they are anymore... and they have to reinvent themselves. I’m no longer Jesse the pastor, now I’m Jesse the... the what? The retiree who forces himself to fill his time? The retiree who is finally happy to have a week or two off, but then gets so bored that I don’t know what to do with myself? The retiree who just gives up and becomes less of the man than I used to be?

Now I know that John wasn’t forced with making his “who am I going to be when I retire” decision... but he kind of was when you think about it. John was proclaiming that he was not the important one, he is not the one to who people should cling, he is not the one that

will save them from their sins... He is just John. He is John who is going to fade into relative obscurity when he does his job and truly introduces Jesus Christ to the masses.

And who is this Jesus Christ, He is the Messiah, He is The Prophet, He is God. Jesus Christ is the Savior of all mankind. Jesus is the only one who came from God the Father in all truth and love, who came to this world to live a perfect life. He came from the Father to die an innocent death and experience the pain and agony of hell that our sins deserved so that we would not have to. He came from the Father to rise from the dead to show that His life, death, and resurrection is sufficient for all of our sins. He is the God-man who has redeemed me, has rescued me, has saved me. This is who Jesus Christ is.

And how do you know this? How do I know this? Because this book tells us so? Well sure, we may have found out from this book, from the Word of God, that Jesus is the Messiah, that He is the Savior, but more than likely you found out when you were baptized. When you

were baptized you had water sprinkled on your head in the name of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And it is when we pour that water with those words that baptism is efficacious. If we just pour water on people it is of no effect, but when we combine that water with the Word of God, then we are baptizing that person. And when we baptize, God tells us that it is the washing of renewal and rebirth.

When we are baptized we are welcomed into the family of God and God works faith in our hearts. When we, as infants, have that Word of God proclaimed over us we become His children. It is at the time of our baptism that we are pulled from the clutches of hell and placed safely in the Savior's arms. And that baptism not only works faith in our hearts but it also strengthens that faith that He has placed there.

And as we live our lives, we are to constantly strengthen that faith that God has placed inside our hearts. When we hear His Word preached. When we read His Word privately for devotions. When we receive the very body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Lord's Supper.

When we receive these Means of Grace from God, not only are we receiving spiritual nourishment for our souls, but we are receiving the very forgiveness of sins that only God can offer.

And once you are baptized... well then any Pharisee, or other person, can come up to you and with the boldness of John you can proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah. With the faith that baptism works in us we can now know God rightly... and we can praise and worship Him.

And in addition, we can stand firm in who we are. We do not have to be driven like a reed in the wind to find out who we are. Whether we are a high school student who is trying to fit in; whether we are a married person who is trying to find out what life has in store; whether we are a retiree who is trying to figure out who they truly are now... regardless of our circumstance in life, when we are baptized we can know that we are God's child. We can know that Jesus lived and died for us. We can know that we are the redeemed children of God because of all that Jesus has done for us.

And just like John the Baptist's famous saying, we too can shout a resounding, "Behold the Lamb of God... who has taken away my sins." This is what Jesus Christ has done for you and because of Jesus... we can look forward to both His birth and His second coming. Regardless of which one of these we see, we can now that Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose for us for the forgiveness of all of our sin. And to provide us comfort, He not only gave His Word... He not only gave His body and blood... He also gave us baptism, which works faith in our heart and makes us children of God.

Dear friends in Christ, four weeks and four messengers. The Word of God, the natural signs and wonders, the prophets and particularly John, and now baptism. For most of us baptism is the first act the church performed for us... and thus through baptism we were told about, the message of Christ, was related to us. Thank God that He has chosen such a special thing for us. Thank God that He has given us His Son and His Means of Grace. And thank God that He has given us the identity that only he can

give and the only one that we need: Child of God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.