

Baptism of our Lord  
Matthew 3:13-17

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Today we begin our first Sunday in the season of Epiphany. The season of Light. This is a season of hope and joy. It is a time to see the light that has come into the world to shine over the darkness. Because there is darkness all around us in this life. Darkness is prominent. It is there. I wouldn't be surprised if most if not all of us have a little feeling of darkness right with us now, some despair, pain, worry, some fear, anxiety or regret. Over 2 million cases of child abuse happen each year. Ten's of Millions of go with out proper nutrition each day, starving and causing bodily harm if not death. There are wars, civil wars, skirmishes, terrorist attack and violence of all kinds happening everyday of the year. There are drugs, alcohol, gambling and addictions of all kinds running rampant in our society. There's cancer, Aids, Heart Disease, Strokes, illnesses of all kind that affect people in all walks of life. It is a hard world that we live in. It is a darkness that is all around us even if we want to close our eyes to it.

Isaiah recognized the fate of people, victims and predators alike all caught in a web of injustice. To his generation he points out to the people that: "Your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity, your lips have spoken lies, your tongue mutters wickedness. No one enters a lawsuit justly, no one goes to the law honestly. The way of peace they know not, and there is no justice in their paths." But even knowing all the despair, corruption and death that surrounds and fills the very people of God, Isaiah also sees a servant of the Lord, a light that is coming to give hope, and redemption, justice and righteousness. He sees the coming light of the world, who will save the world.

In this servant song of Isaiah, we have a picture of the one who will be upheld by God with the fullness of divine power, the anointed one, chosen, with the same spirit as with God, he will not grow faint or be crushed, until he has established justice in all the earth. What a wonderful hope for a better future. What a promise for a people living in a time of Israel's destruction. The listeners of Isaiah in his time, have no home, they were destroyed. They are now living as servants and prisoners in a foreign land. Loved ones have died. Children, parents, wives, husbands, sisters, brothers all have died. Hopes and dreams have been crushed. The darkness is overwhelming them. And Isaiah calls out to them that a servant chosen by God is coming, one with the Spirit of God, the one who is brings justice to all the earth, the one who is the light to all nations. He will be the one who will take upon himself all of the sins, redeem all people, and bring us to righteousness.

Now in light of those words of Isaiah, do you see the magnificence of what took place at the Jordan River when Jesus came to be baptized by John. 600 years after Isaiah predicted the coming of the chosen one of God, the light that would shine justice in all the earth, the servant of the Lord who comes to serve all people, Jesus takes on that very servant role, that Isaiah prophesied about. The voice from heaven declares it "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased." The promise has been kept. Christ is the fulfillment of that promise.

First off we know this because he comes to be baptized by John. If you really stop and think about this why would Jesus, the perfect one, the true God made human need a baptism of repentance. Repentance means to come forward and do an about change of action and Spirit. To stop doing one thing and to turn around and start doing another correct thing. To turn away from evil and sin and to turn to goodness and righteousness. Jesus didn't need that, does he? Even John tries to stop him, trying to prevent him by saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" He recognizes Jesus as the one who he is the anointed one of God, the messiah, the savior. Not as some one that he needs repentance. But instead Jesus comes to become weak, to take on our human sinfulness, to place upon himself all the wrongs of our world, Jesus takes on that servant role and comes to the river wanting that baptism. Right here in the beginning of his ministry Jesus shows what he is about to do. That he has come for the repentance for all those who need a baptism of repentance. He will suffer for all those who suffer. He will be condemned for all our sins. He will die for the punishment that we deserve. And he will rise again as the promised first of all humanity to be raised. He went to those baptismal waters to be that servant that shows us the need to repent and to turn to God and receive righteousness, forgiveness, and joy.

We also see Jesus as the one that Isaiah predicted when he said that the "Spirit of God is upon him." Look again at our Gospel reading. As soon Jesus comes up out of the water, the heavens were opened and the Spirit of God descended alighting on him. Now it comes floating down from heaven like a dove would come fluttering down and the very presence tears back the heavens. This is the same presence of God that is opened on Good Friday when Jesus breaths his last and the curtain of the Holy of Holies is ripped in two from top to bottom. The Holy of Holies was the most inner part of the temple. It was the area that the ark of the covenant was stored and only the High priest himself was allowed behind this massive curtain. It was thought that this area was the one place that God's presence was touching the earth. This spot in this Holy of Holies, behind this massive curtain, inside this temple on the Holy Hill in Jerusalem, was the one spot that God's presence was alive on earth. But on that day that Christ won a freedom over death for us, The curtain tore in two opening up the very presence of God on

earth. This same tearing opens up here at Christ's baptism. the very curtain that once kept the glory of heaven from us, has now been opened and the very presence of God has come, the Spirit of God that rested on Jesus also comes and rests here and is with us through our own baptisms. The very presence of God is with us, alighting on us and granting us faith.

And lastly we know that Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah's words of promise because the voice declares that he is God's son, the beloved, with whom God is well pleased. Isaiah again spoke those very words back 600 years before, to tell a people that God was coming, that he was sending his servant, whom he upholds, his chosen in whom his soul delights. Now Jesus and the crowds there on that day hear those very words spoken of Jesus as that servant, God's beloved. And again we know that these very words are said on by a voice from heaven on the mount of Transfiguration. When Peter, James, and John hear God speak once more that Jesus is his Son, his beloved. Jesus is the fulfillment of all these promises. Isaiah spoke to a people condemned in pain, surrounded by darkness. Feeling lost and forsaken, and in his words he gives them hope.

These words of Isaiah still speak to us today because there are still times when each of us feel like the darkness is winning, that there is evil in the world. We may still see injustice firsthand, be in despair, feel times of pain and frustration. We may be tempted to cry out, "that it isn't fair"

But just like the people of Isaiah's day we can look to the one that is coming and have hope. And one important difference that we have that the people of Isaiah's time didn't is that we know the Son, the servant who does come into the world and grants us a victory. Jesus is the light shining forth for salvation into that darkness, into all the world, promising us that the pains of this world will not last. That suffering, hardships, addictions, hunger, abuse, war, violence, and death itself will pass away. Jesus is the servant who has won for us a place in God's kingdom forever. We rejoice in this promise of our baptisms and remember that everlasting promise this day. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. Amen.