



ISAIAH 42:5-7 | Jesus Baptism—His “Assignment Day”

Sunday, January 11, 2015 – The Festival of the Baptism of Our Lord

⁵ *This is what God, the LORD, says—*

*who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people on it
and life to those who walk on it—*

⁶ *“I, the LORD, have called You
for a righteous purpose,
and I will hold You by Your hand.*

I will keep You and appoint You

*to be a covenant for the people
and a light to the nations,*

⁷ *in order to open blind eyes,
to bring out prisoners from the dungeon,
and those sitting in darkness from the prison house.*

It was a scary day. Thousands of people sat in their chairs waiting for names to be called. as I waited, I don't remember much about the service that came before, but I do remember a man standing in front reading the names of my classmates. I remember people shouting for joy as their place of assignment was called. I remember a wife crying because her husband had just been assigned to a congregation in Alaska. But most of all, I remember praying to the Lord. I remember my name being called. I remember being told I would be moving to Watertown, SD. There I would serve as a teacher, a dorm supervisor and the, and pastor. It was a humbling day because I knew that I would fall short. I knew that I would fail at the tasks my Lord had given to me. I knew that my ministry would be riddled with sin and mistakes. And I knew that the Lord expected so much more from me. As I looked to my Lord for guidance, I also knew that he would be with me and that he would bless me and that those that I serve would be blessed. I knew this because he had promised it. I knew this because God always fulfills his promises.

Christ's baptism was a very similar thing to an assignment day at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary or Martin Luther College. At Christ's baptism we see Christ receiving an assignment from his Father. You see, Christ had come to this earth as a result of many promises. He was born of the Virgin Mary, he had a ministry and a purpose to fulfill as a human on this earth. Christ's served as a sort of “sending off” of Jesus.

John the Baptist would baptize Jesus not because Jesus needed it, not because Jesus was sinful, and not because Jesus needed to be washed clean. Jesus was baptized because he and his ministry needed to begin. For centuries, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed before they could begin their ministry. The anointing was a ceremonial way to show that this specific man would have a specific ministry on earth. His tasks of preaching and leading and defending and sacrificing were approved by God through this anointing.

And so at Christ's baptism, Jesus was anointed as our prophet, priest, and king. And God the Father gave his approval of Christ's ministry at Christ's baptism. There God came down in the form of a dove. There we heard the voice of his Father giving his approval: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." So Jesus' ministry had begun. The prophet Isaiah tells us this morning what his assignment would be. Jesus' assignment was to be a covenant for all people and a light for the nations.

God had made a covenant with his people thousands of years before this event even happened. In fact, thousands of years before God was forced to make a promise. The first two human beings had completely and totally squandered what they had they had been given. They had taken the gifts and the blessings God had given them in their perfect lives and wanted more. They weren't happy with the gifts they had been given. They weren't content living in perfection. They weren't satisfied because they weren't like God. And so they rebelled.

They rebelled against God and his commands. They rebelled against God and his perfect world. Instead of the perfection God had given them, they chose sin. That sin would have an effect on all mankind. That sin permeates not just the hearts of every human, but the very flesh of human beings for every generation since. And God was forced to make a decision: save his people or start over.

We know what God chose. He chose to make a promise: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." From the moment those words were spoken, God's covenant would be kept for generations. The same promise of a savior would be given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It would be given to Moses and to Aaron. It would be given to David and Solomon. It would be given to the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. It would be given to the captives in Babylon and to the exiles returning back to Jerusalem. And it was given to Mary and Joseph.

And we know that story. We know that Mary conceived in the most miraculous way. We know that Joseph was approached by an angel to marry Mary, and we know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, just as the prophets had promised. We also know that Jesus grew up in wisdom and in stature. We know that Jesus was perfect. We know that Jesus lived a perfect life as a child for every child that would live. But Jesus had more work to do than just living as a human. His work was much more than just performing miracles. It was more than just preaching the good news of the good news. Jesus also had to die. That was what was required by God. Blood. Death. A life was needed to save a life. And so Jesus began his ministry on earth and began his task to do just that. He began to serve us and all people by not only living a perfect life but by dying a sacrificial death. God's promise would come true through this man, Jesus Christ.

But why would he need to do such a thing? The answer is simple: because you and I couldn't. You and I are not just sinful; you and I are not just sinners; you and I are prisoners to sin. You and I are completely blind to how horrible and how disgusting we truly are in the sight of God. You and I—on a daily basis—continually and totally rebel against God. Like Adam and Eve and every human before us we don't choose the blessings God gives us. Rather we choose to serve ourselves. And so we are mired in sin. We're stuck in the quicksand of our own guilt and shame. And there is no escaping it. There's nothing that we can do. We can try as hard as we can—we can kick and we can fight with all our might—but our sinful nature only digs us deeper into the depths of sin. And so we need a Savior. We need someone to save us from ourselves. We need Jesus.

And that was Christ's assignment. For generations God had sent people to help his people. He had sent kings, priest, prophets and judges. He had sent these leaders to lead them on the right path. But it was to no avail. These prophets, priests and kings were sinful—just like the people they had been sent to lead! But then God sent Christ. This man was different; this was God's Son. This man is our perfect Prophet, our perfect Priest, and our perfect King. He was sinless. He could do no wrong. This man was here to preach the good news, to us to lead us to freedom from sin, and to give his life as the ultimate sacrifice for us. His baptism was his anointing day, his assignment day. For centuries God had prepared the world for this moment. And “when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” Christ's assignment day—his baptism—is the day when God approved the work Christ was to do.

Dear Christian, Christ is still doing his work for you. Christ has come to save you. Christ has come to live for you. And Christ continues to reign for you. Live for him. Serve him. Praise him. Trust him. Look to him for strength and guidance. Amen.



Soli Deo Gloria!

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