

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Mark 1:4–11**

**Sermon: “Baptism, God at Work”**

The Baptism of Our Lord is always celebrated on the first Sunday of the Epiphany season, the season of revealing. We have just seen Jesus, born of Mary in Bethlehem at Christmas, revealed by a star to the Wise Men as the one born “King of the Jews.”

Now Mark, uniquely among the Synoptics, begins his revealing with the Baptism of Jesus at the beginning of his book. This reveals that Jesus is the Savior, who now begins his ministry of preaching the good news about the kingdom of God, healing the sick, and casting out demons, all culminating in his suffering, death, and resurrection for the salvation of all who believe and are baptized. At Jesus’ Baptism, the Father’s voice reveals, **“*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased*”** (Mark 1:11).

The Epiphany season culminates with the Transfiguration of Our Lord, when the Father speaks again: **“*This is my beloved Son; listen to him*”** (Mark 9:7).

You are having a delightful conversation with a new acquaintance. Your exchange reveals that you have a lot in common. You are both Christians. Even though you have different church backgrounds, you share many of the same values. You both agree that the Bible is God's inspired, infallible Word. You both trust Jesus as the only way to heaven. You both hold to a high standard of morality. You recognize that God has blessed you both in so many ways.

But then you come to a subject that reveals some differences between the two of you. The subject is Baptism. The teaching of Baptism is one among several doctrines that clearly reveal that not all churches are the same. Your friend views Baptism as merely an "outward sign of an inward faith." In other words, after a person repents and believes in Jesus, then he is baptized. This point of view sees Baptism only as our act of obedience to Jesus' command in the Great Commission. It is something that people do to show that they are followers of the Lord.

But you have been taught differently. What you have learned from God's Word is that in Baptism, God is the actor, not man. Baptism is not a law or demand, but a gift of God to bring us into his family. It is a Gospel word! In the Lutheran Church, we hold that Baptism is a "Means of Grace." That is, God brings us forgiveness and eternal life through Baptism. In Baptism, the Holy Spirit is given to us to bring faith and to strengthen faith.

Most of us have friends or even family members who view Baptism as an "outward sign of an inward faith." In this season after the Epiphany, though a season of revealing and shining forth the Gospel of Jesus may we see anew that Baptism reveals that God is the One acting through it to bring us forgiveness and the assurance of salvation.

***"John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"*** (v 4). All of a sudden, here comes John, clothed like an Old Testament prophet.

He does his work out in the country, out in the wilderness by the river Jordan. He spends all of his time in that desolate place preaching to the people. And the people! All those people! They just keep coming and coming! So, John baptizes, one after another after another! What does it all mean? God is taking action! The time had come for God's last prophet to do what the Lord had planned centuries before: prepare the way for the Lord. The promised Savior was about to be revealed!

The fact that so many people were coming out to John to be baptized reveals that God was also at work in the hearts of the people. Mark emphasizes the movement of the throngs of people:

***And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan,***

***confessing their sins.*** Yes, this great multitude of people shows that God had given John some powerful tools: God's Word and the blessing of Baptism. John's Baptism reveals that God was at work.

John's Baptism was not an "outward sign of an inward faith." No, this Baptism was a real Means of Grace. The great multitudes coming out to him were not there to show their faith and demonstrate that they already had the forgiveness of sins. They went out to hear God's Word and turn to him in repentance to receive the forgiveness of sins. ***"John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"*** (v 4).

John's was a Baptism of repentance. The Greek word for repentance literally means "to change your mind." Change our mind about our sin! It will not bring us satisfaction or fulfillment. With every temptation to sin, there is always the deception that it will bring something good to us, some benefit, some fulfillment.

But when we fall into the sin, we find the opposite is true. We experience guilt, emptiness, and shame. Change your mind about sin! It only leads to pain and ultimately death! At the same time, in repentance, we change our mind about God.

He gives us his Law to help us, to protect us, to bless us. He forbids sin not because he is trying to kill our pleasure but to keep us from harm. Change your mind about God! He loves us even though we have sinned, and he offers us forgiveness.

John's was a Baptism of repentance "for the forgiveness of sins." The Greek word often translated "for" could be translated "for the purpose of." John proclaimed a Baptism of repentance for the purpose of the forgiveness of sins. This little word for gives the sense of "leading to."

John's was a Baptism of repentance, leading to the forgiveness of sins. All those people who went out to John, responding to his preaching, were being baptized for the forgiveness of sins. They were receiving God's grace!

But there was one exception. ***"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan"*** (v 9).

Jesus was the only one among all the multitudes of people who came to John for Baptism who did not need the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is the only one who ever lived who did not need to repent. Yes, Jesus' Baptism was different in that sense. But the Baptism of Jesus revealed that he was true God who had come to enact our rescue. ***"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased"*** (v 11). So, the Father's voice from heaven confirms. Jesus' Baptism reveals that God had acted to keep his promise, sending the Savior.

The Baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of his ministry of salvation for us. At his Baptism, Jesus identifies with sinners and was anointed to bring good news to all. While sinful human beings receive Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the only sinless human who is also God received Baptism as the one who would take all sins upon himself. In the Garden of Gethsemane, we get an indication of this, when Jesus expresses, ***"My soul is very sorrowful, even to death"*** (Mark 14:34).

In this mysterious expression of agony, our Lord was already feeling the weight of sin with its guilt and shame. Soon, our Savior would be nailed to the cross, carrying the load of the world's sins, and would receive not the commendation of the Father, but his rejection and punishment! At that moment, the Father was not well pleased with his Son!

But because Jesus acted to bear our sins in his body and took our place under God's judgment, we have grace and mercy. We are blessed with the gift of forgiveness. When we were baptized, God was acting to do amazing things. ***“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his”*** (Romans 6:3–5).



In our Baptism, God acted to unite us with Christ in his death and resurrection. What a powerful Means of Grace God acts in our Baptism to save us! God acts in our Baptism to regenerate us to make us new people, believers in his Son, Jesus Christ, the one who saves us. Our Baptism reveals that that is the kind of God we have, one who is always in action for us.

We were not the ones acting in our Baptism; God was. In our Baptism, God acted to make us his beloved sons and daughters, with whom he is well pleased!

Amen