

“Baptism, a Miracle?”—Luke 3:21-22

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Baptism, a Miracle?”, is Luke 3:21-22 → *Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

The Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines a “miracle” as “an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs” or “an extremely outstanding or unusual event, thing, or accomplishment.” When most people testify to miracles happening in their lives it is usually an event which they consider “extraordinary,” “mysterious” or defying the laws of nature, usually thought of as working good in our lives somehow. Maybe you’ve read, heard or even shared stories of the miraculous working of the LORD in our human situations where it is believed that divine intervention was manifested.

However, since divine intervention is actually a common occurrence could we consider everyday as living in the miracles of the LORD? Yahweh is the God of miracles in both the ordinary and extraordinary

activities of life and death on a daily basis. For God, “divine intervention” is not a special thing—it is **life itself as He provides for us spiritually and physically each day**. This is the essence of our text which records the account of the LORD’s “divine intervention” into our lives with the baptism of Jesus.

The Jews of John the Baptizer’s day were looking for a miracle to take place—the coming of the Messiah-Redeemer. A promise connected with the Messiah’s coming from Zechariah 13:1 reads: *On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness*. Since John came administering a *baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins* (cf. Luke 3:3)—a spiritual cleansing with water—it is no wonder that *the people were in expectation . . . questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ* (i.e. the Messiah) (cf. Luke 3:15).

In addition to clarifying that He was **not** the Messiah, John stated that he did not consider himself worthy to serve as Jesus’ servant by simply untying His *sandals*. John also made a differentiation between his baptism and that of Jesus. John’s baptism was to prepare them for Jesus, Whom he said would *baptize us with the Holy Spirit and with fire* (cf. Luke 3:16).

While this reference to Jesus’ baptizing *with the Holy Spirit and with fire* found a specific fulfillment on the Day of Pentecost it also finds

fulfillment in the miracle which God does every time a baptism takes place today. The promise is given in Acts 2:38 that everyone who is baptized receives *the forgiveness of . . . sins, and . . . the gift of the Holy Spirit*, Who gives you faith in Jesus and applies His work to your life.

Fire is used in Scripture both as a picture of judgment on sin and cleansing or purifying. John pictured the judgment upon sin as coming in the Person & Work of Jesus. He said in Luke 3:17 → *His winnowing fork is in His hand, to clear His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire*. In this harvesting picture *the wheat* represents believers who will receive eternal life and *the chaff* represents unbelievers who will suffer eternal punishment in hell. Jesus came in a miraculous way to perform His miraculous work so that you can have eternal life by faith in Him!

It is very interesting that Jesus Himself was baptized considering He was not sinful and didn't need baptism. According to Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism John recognized his own need to be baptized by Jesus. In Matthew 3:15 Jesus said: *Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*. Jesus' baptism one part of His humiliation, identifying Himself with fallen, broken sinners in order to *fulfill all righteousness **for you!*** It was one part of His miraculous work so you can be forgiven and live in a right relationship with God forever.

Jesus' baptism also marked the beginning of His public ministry

which eventually led to His suffering, death and resurrection. In Luke 12:50 Jesus even referred to these events as *a baptism to be baptized with* which cause Him *great . . . distress* in its accomplishment. It actually marked the beginning of His public rejection and suffering to accomplish the miracle of God's grace in our lives. Because of Jesus' fulfilling *all righteousness* on our behalf we have the privilege of experiencing the miracle of faith and new life through baptism as well as living that miracle everyday.

The presence of the Holy Spirit and the Father's voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism verified His special relationship with God the Father—that He was the expected promised Messiah. The Father's words echo Psalm 2:7 where Jesus is spoken about as a King as well as Isaiah 42:1 where God says: *Behold My Servant, Whom I uphold, My chosen, in Whom My soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon Him.*

In John 3:5 Jesus referred to baptism as being *born of water and the Spirit* in order to *enter the kingdom of God*. Baptism is one way you become a member of God's Kingdom "to serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness" (*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, © 2017 Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO. p. 17) **today**. This means that your baptism is meant to be lived today in the way you perceive life as well as how you act toward and treat others. It does not mean you are sinless and perfect. Rather, because you are baptized you

are willing to recognize when you fail God by your sins, accept responsibility for them, confess them and cling to Jesus your righteousness. In other words, your baptism defines who you are as God's forgiven child in every way.

The people whom John baptized wanted to know how to act in this new baptismal life, a desire given by the Holy Spirit. John gave them instructions on how their baptism would display itself in the daily vocations of their life. He told them *whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise*. He told them to be honest in their financial dealings with others, to *not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and to be content with our wages*. Our baptisms should affect the way we live in all the vocations of life which we fill.

I have wondered many times if the alternative to “counseling,” self-help books, support groups and psychological treatments could be simply reminding a person of his/her baptism. Or . . . better yet . . . that our “counseling,” self-help books, support groups and psychological treatments should be filled with the righteousness of Christ and His baptismal presence in the midst of our daily struggles with sin in our situations. After all, Jesus' baptism was His desire to carry us through the struggles of sin, selfishness and temptation with His work on our behalf. Because of the new creation you are in Christ through your

baptism, Romans 6:11 says you are to *consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus*. We are victors in Christ, not victims.

This perspective of my baptism identifying me as a child of God also affects the way I view other people. When I engage another person in conversation I desire to know if they **are** baptized. Notice, I didn't say I desire to know if they **were** baptized. I want to know if they **are** baptized. The distinction is subtle. However, it helps me to focus on them as God's child in the present because the Holy Spirit is miraculously at work in and through them **now**. In other words, the Holy Spirit not only worked the miracle of faith and salvation at some point in your past through your baptism as a means of grace but He also continues to work the same miracles in your life each and every day now.

Where do you look for miracles in your life? Do you seek them only in the midst of the seemingly impossible situations? Do you seek them only whenever you are desperate for some kind of relief and comfort? Do you look for them only in the midst of the trying, difficult times where it appears your only hope is for a miracle? It seems it is under such circumstances that most people recognize the occurrence of a miracle.

As God's baptized children we recognize the occurrence of miracles everyday of our lives because they are bound up in the Person and on-going Work of Jesus, not bound by our circumstances and situations. We can see His miraculous working in both the favorable and

unfavorable, the ordinary and the extraordinary experiences, because they are connected to His written Word and promises eternally.

God works the miracle of faith in our lives and hearts through His Word and that Word connected with the water so that we can miraculously live new lives **today and into eternity!** Amen.

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.***

(Romans 6:3-4)

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