

“JESUS GETS OFF ON THE RIGHT(EOUS) FOOT!”

Matthew 3:13-17

Friends in the Lord,

The Christmas hoopla has pretty much died down. Those familiar readings and age-old carols are once again packed away in the memories of our hearts just like the decorations, trees, garland, and lights are packed away in boxes. Some of us watched the ball drop to ring in 2014 and 1/3 of all resolutions made 10 days ago are long since broken already! Epiphany started January 6th and North Pole temperatures paid us a rare three-day visit.

Isn't a New Year supposed to get us off on the right foot? Isn't a new church year season supposed to get us going in the right direction? Well yes & no! **YES** – a new calendar year can mean changes in our lives. And **NO** – a new season of the church year assumes we were in the right direction to begin with.

Perhaps this just shows us that it's not always easy to get off on the right foot, and if we do – to stay there. So we have the First Sunday after the Epiphany which is better known in the church year as the **BAPTISM OF OUR LORD** Sunday. While the details of Jesus' baptism are well-known, the real meaning of those details is what we give our attention to in our message today.

Let us get our service and worship this weekend off to a good start by witnessing how:

“JESUS GETS OFF ON THE RIGHT(EOUS) FOOT!”

To understand what I mean, we focus on how:

1. Jesus fulfills what he started
2. Jesus is the Son with whom the Father is pleased

1

About 30 years of silence have passed since the Wise Men's visit according to Matthew's gospel. Back then, he was a toddler. Now he is fully grown and suddenly bursts on the scene in our text after Matthew opens the scene with John the Baptist as the official **FORERUNNER** of the Messiah. The baptism of Jesus is a fascinating story of God's love for sinners and the love of a Father for His Son. It's a thrilling story that follows the Wise Men's visit and those 30 some years of silence.

Like a play where the curtain opens for the characters to begin, Matthew begins by saying: **THEN JESUS CAME FROM GALILEE TO THE JORDAN TO BE BAPTIZED BY JOHN.** “**THEN**” – at just the right time, at the time that was proper, exactly on cue – Jesus enters the stage to **GET OFF ON THE RIGHT(EOUS) FOOT** to fulfill what he started and begin his public ministry to journey to the cross and tomb.

So Jesus requests John to baptize him. On the surface that doesn't sound too strange – until you begin thinking like John. The “**GREATER**” should submit to the “**LESSER**”? Didn't John the Baptist just blast the Pharisees and Sadducees about their pious show in coming to be baptized without really repenting of their sins calling them “**YOU BROOD OF VIPERS!**” Didn't John just confess **how one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry, is coming to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire?**

To John's way of thinking, Jesus' request is a contradiction of what he just confessed. So **JOHN TRIED TO DETER HIM...** The English isn't strong enough. John did everything he could in his power to prevent this from happening. He was persistent, stubborn, even pig-headed in his attempt to change Jesus' mind. Why? Because in John's eyes, Jesus needed to baptize him, not the other way around! Jesus didn't have any sin. John was the damned sinner who needed to repent. John needed **the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.** {Titus 3:5}

Jesus could not disagree with anything John was thinking. But Jesus didn't request baptism to wash away sin – for he had none. Jesus came to fulfill what he started. So he responds to John's request with 2 short 'n sweet answers:

1st answer: **LET IT BE SO NOW.** With authority in his voice and his words, Jesus reminds John who's in control here. Like a commander in charge, Jesus issues this order by saying: “**Let this happen! Let's do this!**”

2nd answer: **IT IS PROPER FOR US TO DO THIS TO FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS.** Things are not what they seem, John. It is completely appropriate for you to baptize Jesus. Jesus is fulfilling what he started. What he started a long time ago was **His active obedience** in living each day, each hour, each minute, each second in perfect conformity to His Heavenly Father. His work of redeeming mankind began a long time before this. His life was free from sin, the holy perfection God demands of everyone, but no one except Jesus can fulfill.

Now the time for Jesus to enter the passive part of his saving work was to begin. So **JOHN CONSENTED**. Here at Jordan's bank at his baptism, Jesus willfully begins **the passive obedience** of his ministry where he allows his life to be taken as atonement for our sins. He begins that long road to the cross to step into our sinful shoes and become sin for us to finish the work His Father gave him to do to earn the forgiveness of all sins, freedom from the devil, and the guarantee of everlasting life. Jesus **gets off on the right foot and the righteous foot** by standing in the Jordan River to be baptized. And when John baptizes Jesus, His work of earning God's righteousness for us now kicks into high gear to finish and fulfill the mission of His heavenly Father and be **the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**.

2

As the curtains pull back to show the baptism of our Lord, there is no lack of focus at the rivers edge. Jesus **gets off on the right foot** with His Father because **He is the Son with whom the Father is pleased!**

The Gospels do not say how Jesus was baptized. What matters is what happens after. **AS SOON AS JESUS WAS BAPTIZED, HE WENT UP OUT OF THE WATER. AT THAT MOMENT HEAVEN WAS OPENED AND HE SAW THE SPIRIT OF GOD DESCENDING LIKE A DOVE AND LIGHTING ON HIM. AND A VOICE FROM HEAVEN SAID, "THIS IS MY SON, WHOM I LOVE, WITH HIM I AM WELL PLEASED.** Heaven opened – this wasn't just a parting of the clouds to let the sunshine in. Literally heaven pulled back its curtains to reveal its glory and splendor just like it did when Stephen looked up and saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

The Spirit anointed Jesus in his baptism. He empowered him as true Man to completely identify with sinful mankind and become our substitute to suffer our penalty and price of redemption. In the form of a dove, the Spirit descends on Jesus as a source of strength on that long road to the cross and grave.

And finally the VOICE of God applauding and approving what Jesus is about to do. It was a vocal "seal of approval" to let the nations know that Jesus is the Messiah, the one to rescue sinners by willingly shedding his lifeblood for all. The Father expresses his deep love by adding how pleased He is with His Son!

I don't know what heaven opened looks like. I don't know how the Spirit descended on Jesus. I don't know how booming was God's voice. But I do know how much you and I need Jesus to **get off on the right foot** to earn our righteousness for us. For by nature, we are dead, blind, and enemies of God. By nature, our sins put us on a one-way journey to everlasting hell with no exit to get off that path. By nature, **we were sinful from birth, sinful from the time our mothers conceived us**, {Ps 51:5} the Psalmist says. What a losing formula: hell opened, the devil on us, and God is **not** pleased with us.

That's why we visit Jesus today and everyday. A long time ago most of us were brought to a baptismal font. Water was applied and God's name was attached. That combination was the means the Spirit used to descend on us to bring us to faith. At our baptisms, heaven opened and God lowered a ladder in the shape of a cross. That Spirit gave us the faith to believe and follow Jesus up that ladder to heaven. And the Father is pleased with us because of all that Christ has done to forgive our sins, wipe our hearts clean, and pay our debt to God in full. No wonder God was pleased with His Son, because that's the only way God could be pleased with us.

When is your baptism date? **Find it – learn it – remember it!** This is your most important date of your life—more than your birthday, more than your anniversary. Don't pack that date away like decorations but keep it out all year.

If anyone here is unbaptized, or is not sure what baptism means, or just wants to review its blessings, then register for Pastor Mahnke's "**Spiritual Rebirth**" baptism seminar on **January 25th @ K2L**. There you will learn why the Father is pleased with you now and will be pleased to open heaven and receive you forever as heirs of eternal life. And when that happens, **talk about "getting off on the right foot!"** AMEN