

## First Sunday after Epiphany

### Sermon Text – Mark 1:4-11

**Theme:** Baptised child of God

Grace, peace and mercy to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In those days, that is the days in which John the Baptist was calling people to repentance, away from the trappings of this world and back into a right relationship with God. In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Mk 1: 9-11)

Jesus’ baptism is so critical for Mark as he wrote his gospel account, it marks the beginning, the foundation of all that is to follow. Baptism is not the place where salvation was won for humanity – but it is the means by which God’s salvation is delivered to all who are baptised and believe.

Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

### Move One – The Challenge

It has been weighing on my mind for some time now, that perhaps it is the right time to preach a series of sermons that emphasise why it is that we attend *this* church. Why are we members of the Lutheran Church and not some other church which may be closer and more convenient to where you live? I don’t know what answer each of you would give. My prayer is that whatever answer given, it is more substantial than, “we’re a bunch of friendly people”; or “we do good morning tea.”

Being friendly is important and sharing a good cuppa with others is a joy. But the point of the question is to remind you and encourage you that our church is founded on God’s Word and we don’t interpret his word in a vacuum but according to the tradition handed down through the Lutheran Church. This isn’t meant to be a trumpet call of ‘we’re right and you’re wrong’. But it is meant to encourage you that in a tide of humanity which is searching for concrete answers and substance, our church has something positive to say.

### Move Two – Baptism – A new beginning

To help us understand the importance of baptism, we’re going to take a short test!

Question One: The Bible teaches that sin destroyed the relationship between God and humanity. If, in order to be saved, humanity needs to be restored to God, who has the power to restore this relationship, God or humanity? (God)

Question Two: The Bible teaches that baptism establishes a new relationship between the sinner and his gracious God. In baptism is it God, or is it humanity, that is doing and making the change? (God)

Question Three: Does the Bible say that baptism has the power to regenerate a lost sinner and give this person new life and salvation? (Yes).

How did you go in our baptismal test? The answers are: 1) God is the one who has the power and the desire to restore our broken relationship back to himself. 2) As God has the power, he is the active one who does the work of baptising and he does this primarily through the Holy Spirit. 3) Titus 3:5 teaches us that we have been regenerated through the washing of Holy Baptism and we are renewed through the Holy Spirit.

Humanity brought about the problem of our broken relationship with God, so it was God who gave us the means by which this damaged relationship can once more be restored as He intended. Through Baptism, God gives us a new beginning. The old person, born into sin, is destroyed; and from the waters of baptism, a new person emerges, born of water and the Spirit.

### Move Three – Choosing to be baptised?

In the Lutheran Church, we have always baptised both children and adults. Some churches would argue that since a child can’t answer for him or herself, it makes no sense to be baptised. After all, our rite

of baptism includes questions of intention and faith. But if we understand that baptism is what God is doing for his people, not what we do for God, it makes perfect sense that we baptise children as well as adults.

Let me give you an example. Later today we will be baptising young Johann Knopke. Johann was born in August last year and unless I'm pretty much mistaken, he's not driving as yet. And having spent time with he and his mum last week, I can tell you he's not talking yet either. So here we have a young person who is born, as we all were, with the affliction of sin. He is as separated from his Heavenly Father, just as we all were. There is nothing he can physically do to bring himself to be baptised or to be restored back to God. He can't ask for help, he can't drive to the church, and it's certainly too far to crawl! There is nothing Johann, or any child can do to restore themselves to God.

So God brings Johann to himself and he does this through the work of the Holy Spirit who continues his work of calling and gathering the whole Christian church. And the Holy Spirit does his work through Johann's parents, Warren and Debbie. The Holy Spirit works through grandparents, through the congregation, through the priesthood of all believers.

If baptising a child makes sense because it demonstrates that it is the work of God who is restoring the relationship, does this mean the baptising of older children or of adults is not so effective? No, of course not. But just as an infant is helpless to bring about its own salvation, so too neither growing children nor adults can come to be baptised without God calling them. Once more it is God who works through family, or friends, or through the congregation but most of all through the Word of God to lead them to salvation which begins with baptism.

The Lutheran Church's teaching on baptism says the work is God's, it is *not our decision* which brings about our salvation. Even if we baptise adults, whatever decision they might make regarding their faith journey is because of God working in them and through them. Our decisions and our commitments aren't worth too much to us, and they certainly aren't worth anything to God. You see, if we could make a decision to follow God and to trust in him alone, and to obey his commandments, we wouldn't need Jesus. So instead of putting any trust in our decisions, put your trust in God and that he has called you to be baptised and through your baptism he has adopted you for all time.

#### **Move Four – Living as baptised children**

What does it mean then to live as a baptised child of God? I'll not belabour this point as many of you have heard me deal with this at other times. Suffice to say that you *are* baptised, not you were once baptised. Once a person is baptised, they can never be unbaptised. They may live as though they are not, but all they are missing out on are the benefits that God wants to give them – forgiveness of sins and eternal life. This is why our church acknowledges that baptism is God's work alone. Even though we might spend time away from the church, in my case nearly 30 years, because baptism was always God's work, he keeps on searching and calling for his lost sheep. And when they stop running from him, the relationship is already there, just as a long lost child might return to their parents once more.

And as a baptised child, you are invited to keep coming back to the font, asking God to forgive you for the sins you commit, even those that keep on troubling you. Keep coming back to the font, asking God to forgive you, not because you promise to do better, not because you give something up, or any other reason that you might come up with. Keep coming back to the font and ask God to forgive you because you are a baptised child who belongs to him and he promises you forgiveness.

This forgiveness comes through Christ's righteousness. It comes to you because you are joined with Jesus through baptism. When Jesus was baptised in the Jordan River, he had no need of baptism. John was baptising people for repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Jesus had no sin and therefore *he didn't need baptism*. But by being baptised, you have been given the opportunity to stand by his side and so when you ask God to forgive you, he sees not your sins, but instead he sees Jesus' righteousness. Jesus won your salvation on the Cross, and this salvation has been delivered to you through Holy Baptism, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.