

**Service of Evening Prayer for Advent  
December 10, 2003  
John 1:32-34**

*Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke*

**John the Baptist Proclaims the Savior as Baptizer**

1. John baptized
2. Jesus baptized
3. We have been baptized

*Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.*

(Since tonight's sermon text is a first person testimony from John the Baptist, I'd like you to imagine tonight that John the Baptist is standing here preaching this sermon.)

Good evening, and welcome to my corner of the world, the parched desert on the east side of the Jordan River. I beg your pardon for not dressing according to your custom, but there's a reason for my unusual attire. My camel's hair coat and the leather belt enable people to identify me as a prophet. Camel's hair is rough and itchy, but this is the way the mighty prophet Elijah dressed. Maybe you know that in the second to last verse of the Old Testament, the LORD said that he would send Elijah before the coming of the Messiah. That's why I'm here. I'm the advance man for the Christ, the one who prepares the way before the coming of the Christ.

Tonight, as you are just two weeks away from celebrating the birth of our Savior, I want to give you my testimony about Jesus. Last week, you heard me say about Jesus that he is the Lamb of God. Tonight I want to tell you something about Jesus that may not be as familiar to your ears; maybe it will even sound peculiar to you. I tell you tonight as I told the folks who came out to the Jordan River, Jesus our Savior, is a Baptizer. Now I realize that I'm the one that you most readily identify as the Baptizer, but Jesus is a baptizer, too. I'll explain, but I need to give you some background first.

**1. John baptized**

St. John quotes me here in the first chapter of his Gospel: *"I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him."* Let me fill you in on this, because John assumes you know the story. I spent a good deal of my brief ministry at places like Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, and at Aenon

near Salim, where there was plenty of water for baptisms. Of course, I didn't just baptize. I preached. I preached that people should repent because the kingdom of God was approaching. They knew I was talking about the Messiah's coming. God blessed my preaching so that vast crowds of people came out into the desert. Not just the people from the Judean countryside, but also big city folks from Jerusalem came out to the Jordan. Why, there were even Pharisees and Sadducees who came out to investigate what I was doing.

What I was doing, in addition to preaching, was baptizing. By that I mean that I was applying water to people in a ceremonial way. I've heard that people in your day are still debating the meaning of the baptisms I was doing. Remember, my work was to call people to repent, to make a break with their sinful way of living and to turn to God in sorrow for their sins and with faith in his mercy. The baptisms I administered did more than symbolize to people that sins had been washed away. I like the way Paul's friend, John Mark, described my baptizing. He wrote, "**John came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.**" (Mark 1:8) My father, Zechariah, when I was just an infant, said much the same thing to me. He said, "**You will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of their salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.**" (Luke 1:76-77) The best way to prepare for the coming of the Lord is to believe that the Messiah came to pay for your sin. That's what my baptizing was all about.

I baptized a lot of people in my time, but I have to tell you that nothing can compare with one particular baptism. I was out there at the Jordan, baptizing one after another in this long line of people when I looked up and there stood Jesus. He wanted to be baptized! Well, I tried to refuse. Can you imagine: the Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, wants to be baptized just like a common sinner? And he insisted, because I think that was just the point—like a common sinner. He came to take our place. So I baptized him. It was amazing. As Jesus was leaving the water, heaven was opened, and I saw the Spirit of God descend from heaven in the form of a dove and light on him. Then I heard the voice of God the Father say, "**This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.**" (Matt. 3:17) We didn't have your word Trinity when I was alive, but I think it does a great job of describing what I witnessed: the three distinct persons of the one true God. I heard the voice of God the Father. I saw the Spirit in the form of a dove. And I saw Jesus, the Son of God. Oh, I knew Jesus before. How could I not have known him: we're related! But there at the Jordan River, I knew Jesus as the Messiah, as the Son of God. That's a big part of what I wanted to say to you tonight.

Now I've told you that my ministry attracted a lot of attention, especially in Judea and Jerusalem. But I want to be clear about this: I'm not the main attraction. Jesus is. I'm just the best man; he's the groom. In fact, he's so much greater than I am that I'm not worthy to bend down and tie his shoelaces. The theme of my ministry was that Jesus must become greater and I must become less. And

not long after Jesus began his public ministry, that's what happened. I became less. My job was complete. The Messiah had begun the public phase of his work. The fact is, I feel like I've spent too much time already tonight talking about me. Let me give you more of my testimony about Jesus. Maybe this surprises you: He's a baptizer, too.

## 2. Jesus baptized

Now I don't think that anyone has ever been able to prove that Jesus baptized anyone with water. I know it says in John 3:22 that "**Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized,**" but the next chapter clarifies that it was actually Jesus' disciples who did the baptizing. So I think my point still stands about Jesus not baptizing anyone with water.

But one of the things I said quite frequently about the Messiah is that when he came, he would baptize not with water, like I did, but with the Spirit of God. I was referring to the same thing that the prophet Joel talked about: that when Messiah came, he was going to pour out the Spirit of God. The fulfillment of what I was talking about came on the day of Pentecost, just 50 days after Jesus rose from the grave. Jesus baptized with the Spirit that day. There was the sound of a violent wind and tongues of fire came to rest on the apostles. And, then, by the enabling of the Holy Spirit, the apostles began to preach about the wonders of God in languages that they'd never studied. People from all over the world heard them speaking in their own native tongues. By their preaching, and through baptism, the Christian Church grew by 3,000 souls that day. And those who believed and were baptized also received the gift of the Holy Spirit, just as God had promised through me. I think Peter summed that amazing day up pretty well when he said in his Pentecost sermon, "**Exalted to the right hand of God, (Christ) has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.**" (Acts 2:33)

## 3. We are baptized

With a nickname like "the Baptizer," you might guess that I have a pretty high estimate of baptism and you'd be right. I do. And part of my reason for coming here tonight is to remind you of what a wonderful blessing you received when you were baptized.

I've heard that there are people who look down on baptism. We had them in my day, too. "Do you mean to tell me that splashing a little water on a person changes their status in the eyes of God?" they ask. To quote Martin Luther, "They look at baptism like a cow looks at a new barn door." They don't get it. And I'll admit: baptism isn't all that impressive. There's not the voice of God and descent of the dove and the opening of heaven like there was when Jesus was

baptized. Maybe you were sleeping while you were baptized as a little child. Maybe the pastor who baptized you struggled to pronounce your name right. Or maybe it wasn't a pastor who baptized you, but a midwife, a nurse, or your father. It doesn't matter. It's a simple ceremony and its power derives not from the person doing the baptizing but from God's promise. There's not much to it: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" you say as you're applying common water to the person. And that's it!

But the promise that Jesus has attached to baptism is as magnificently uncommon as the water of baptism is common. Your baptism was water used by God's command and connected with God's promise. It was a baptism for the forgiveness of sins, therefore your baptism is a washing of new birth and spiritual regeneration. Through baptism, you are saved! You become an "heir of gifts a king would covet."

In your baptism with water, you were also baptized with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God worked in and through the water of baptism to bring you to trust God's promises of forgiveness in Christ. He is the one who led you to confess Jesus as your Lord. Once you became a believer, the Spirit made his residence in your heart. He works to assure you that you're a precious member of God's family. He is the one who enables you to obey when God tells you to choose what is best and he is the one who provides you with the power to live a life of godliness.

I fear that for some of you, you think of your baptism merely as something that happened long ago and you don't see its relevance today. But I ask you to remember this: How did I work during my ministry to prepare people for the coming of the Lord? I baptized them, didn't I? They heard God's call to repent as I voiced it and they confessed their sins and were baptized. Now how do you think we should go about preparing people for the Second Coming of Jesus? I think the same way: baptism. I don't mean that you should go out and be baptized again. The promise God made to you originally still holds. But go back to your reason for being baptized: You saw your sins and confessed them. Then you sought God's forgiveness in baptism. Go back to that promise. **"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."** (Acts 2:38) When you are living every day in the knowledge of your salvation through the forgiveness of sins won for you by Jesus, then you are prepared to meet the Lord.

Well, thanks for hearing my testimony! I look forward to talking with you more when we're all together with the Lamb of God in heaven. Amen.