

Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus was prepared to “launch” into his public ministry as we step into Matthew ch.3. We see Jesus enter the Jordan River with John as the opening scene of three, detail-loaded years of Jesus’ life. We know very little, by the way of details, about his life before this. I mean think about it: we have about 3 pages of the Bible that cover from his birth to age 30. But from here on out, we have 85 chapters compiled covering the last approximately 3 years leading up to His death and resurrection.

And there is a ton communicated to us on this first page of those 3 years, as the floodgates of information open to us. A really interesting thing to see is how, at this first event after a silence of the past 18 years of his life, we’re given an insight and assurance about what happened during those years prior. Do you catch what I’m referencing?

God the Father spoke from heaven this day: “This is my Son... I am well pleased with Him.”

What does that mean? That means Jesus’ baptism was for a different reason than our baptisms. For if God the Father was well pleased with Him, Jesus had no sin to be washed away.

And with that... Do you hear what we learn about Jesus’ life for the 18 years leading up to this, and for the 12 years prior to that also? He never sinned. That’s the detail God has deemed it necessary for us to know.

And here’s the truth I want us to really take to heart today, so that Lord-willing we’ll have it a little more quickly at ready recall for the days ahead. We do ourselves a huge disservice if we give little time to thinking about and discussing the perfect life of Jesus.

Do you ever spend much time thinking what Jesus, the child, was like? Jesus, the teen? Jesus, the young adult? We should think about this, because as a child, as a teen, as a young adult, He was living *for* you. He was obeying perfectly, loving perfectly, because he knew you and I would fail at that. And the consequence for our failure would mean eternal separation from Him. He couldn’t bear to leave us hopeless. So he stepped in.

So now think about what that entailed. As a boy moving from Egypt to Israel, Jesus never lashed out at his parents in complaint: “Why did you have to bring us so far? I’m not walking any more. Just deal with it. It’s not my fault after all.” He lived and moved content in God the Father’s care. He showed respect and love to the parents given him.

Then in his years growing up in Nazareth, he never sought revenge when people wronged him. He never got envious because someone else was better at whatever activity he and the other kids happened to be trying that day. He never tried to elevate himself by tearing down someone else.

In the one account we do know from his years growing up, at age 12 you and I see how very interested Jesus was in studying and spending time discussing everything he could of God’s Word at the Temple. And so we see, He didn’t just avoid all the things God commands “Don’t do.” He also obeyed all the commands where God says, “Do that or this good thing.” Do dedicate time to hearing and treasuring God’s Word. Do honor your parents and obey them. Do love your neighbor. “Whatever is true, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable... think about such things.” Jesus did.

So continue for a moment more to apply what that means. Give time for the perfect obedience of Jesus to get locked in secure into your heart where it is treasured. Kids, what kind of temptations do you face when a little brother or sister, or a friend, has pestered you or hit you or made fun of you? How many times have you gotten angry, or retaliated with a mean word spoken to them or spoken behind their back? Later in the New Testament we hear, Jesus was tempted in every way we are tempted but remained without sin. He faced temptation. But He never gave in to it.

As you get older, and you are teens or young adults, you know your body goes through changes. Jesus’ body did too. So think of the temptations he faced. Do you think there were no attractive girls around in Jesus’ day? (It’s not wrong for you to notice someone’s looks. For those of you are still single, it wouldn’t be wrong for you guys to think, “She’s attractive” - girls to think, “He’s good looking.” Hopefully, you’ll also be looking for other even more important qualities. And all that’s not wrong. But it is wrong to lust.) Again, we are told: Jesus faced the same kind of temptations we face. But He never gave in. He never sinned.

Adults, you’ve undoubtedly been making applications to your life from the examples we’ve talked about. Add on this one more. How many times have you been tempted to take the easy way out of situations, when sticking to God’s will is likely to bring with it some mockery, some tension or even hostility? Each and every time Jesus was pressured, he pushed temptation away – he escaped the traps set before him.

Treasure this. Everything we lack, which God commands, He did. He lived it, so that He could gift it to you and me - a holy life through and through.

So then the question maybe arises, you wouldn't be alone if you've thought of it: Why did Jesus come to John to be baptized? Jesus explains: *"This is fitting to fulfill all righteousness."* That tells you: His baptism is God's will and part of God's Plan for Jesus' life. We hear reference to this already in the Old Testament in Isaiah ch.42, which we heard earlier today: *"I will put my Spirit on him, my chosen one"* (see also Isaiah 11:1f). And in Isaiah ch.61, in the Savior's own words foretold, we hear: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me."*

As heaven opens this day in Matthew ch.3, the Holy Spirit takes the form of a dove. And we are assured of Jesus' identity as God's Anointed. And then God the Father's voice, booming with delighted love, broadcasts Jesus' eternal identity as his Son and his fatherly delight in 30 perfect years. And so not only "who Jesus is" is made clear; the quality of his life is clear. Jesus lived up to God's perfect standard. He receives the verdict from heaven, *"I am well pleased."*

And in this, with all this laid out for us, we have the beginning of the answer to another important question. It's a question people sometimes ask.

People ask, "How can baptism save a person?" (speaking of baptism for us).

We see the answer standing in the water at Jesus' baptism.

We hear the answer spoken from heaven on this day as water drips from Jesus' brow at his baptism.

And we receive the benefit in our baptism from the same one who shows His presence at Jesus' baptism in the form of a dove.

The One working in our baptism is God the Holy Spirit.

For just as certainly as we see our Triune God present on the day of Jesus' baptism, our Triune God is assuredly present at our baptism. Yes, in your baptism too the Holy Spirit descends. The living, and life-giving, Word of God is voiced.

And in this case - of our baptism - the Holy Spirit works through that Word, which He ties with the tangible element of water.

And what does He bring? What does He do? He himself says. It's all right here in His Word...

- Baptism saves you - not the removal of dirt from the body, but the assurance of a good conscience toward God - 1 Peter 3:21. Such a good, clean, conscience is only possible because sin has been washed away.

- He saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. - Titus 3:4-5
- ...to make us holy, cleansing us by the washing with water through the Word. - Ephesians 5:26
- You are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. - Galatians 3:27

The Holy Spirit gives and strengthens faith. By the power of God and His promise, the baptism of each of us has intimately connected us to everything that belonged to Jesus on the day at the Jordan River on record in Matthew ch.3.

- To the water he contributes his perfect record; we each bring our record of sin.
- As your baptism connects you to Jesus, there you receive a gift from Jesus – forgiveness –, and there he takes away a burden you cannot bear – all your sin.

And there in the water of baptism, because you are connected to the Chosen Savior, the Son of God, you receive the additional gifts. There in the water and the Word you receive the gift and seal of being God's own child because of Jesus' life and death for you. And there in the water and the Word of your baptism, the same Father who delightedly announced his good pleasure with his eternal Son announces with equal delight his good pleasure with you. How, you ask? He has clothed you with Jesus' perfect life of obedience!

And so walking away from Jesus' baptism, carry side by side the news and assurance of two identities: both Jesus' identity, and your identity as a baptized child of God.

My prayer today is that these truths have been secured deeply into your heart, treasured and ready for regular, quick recall in the days ahead. Here's a final word of application with both those in mind:

The way to regard and use Baptism rightly is to draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or consciences trouble us. We then must say, 'See here, I am baptized. And since I am baptized, I have the assurance that I shall be saved in soul and body and have eternal life. ... Thus we see how splendid a thing Baptism is. It snatches us out of the devil's jaws, makes God our own, defeats and puts away sin, daily strengthens the new person in us, keeps functioning, and remains with us until we leave our present troubles to enter glory everlasting. [Luther's Large Catechism, p.104,109, CPH]

Amen.