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Baptism of our Lord
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MARK 1:4 – 11 “WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED”

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Blessed Epiphany to you all! The season of Christmas in which the Church celebrates the incarnation of our Lord has come to an end and the season of Epiphany has begun. During Epiphany the Church celebrates the revealing, the public manifestation, the appearing, of Christ Jesus to the world. The day of Epiphany was on January 6, and those who gathered for Worship heard how God revealed to the Magi, a group of non-Jewish or Gentile folks from the eastern regions of what is now Iraq and Iran, that the King of the Jews had been born. A star of sorts moved before them and stopped over the house where Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were in Bethlehem; thus the Magi knew where to find the One born King of the Jews and they worshiped Him and gave gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Today within the season of Epiphany we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord Jesus, where He is revealed to us as God's beloved Son, in whom, God is well pleased. Jesus is shown to us as God's chosen One, His Christ, in whom the Spirit dwells fully. Jesus is manifest as Israel, God's chosen people, but a sinless and faithful Israel, unlike the former. Jesus is the Light of the world; the Light who shines in the darkness; the Light who has overcome the darkness of sin, death, and the devil for us.

It is for this reason that our Old Testament reading comes from Genesis 1:1-5 for this day. *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.* God created all things through His spoken Word. "Let there be light," and there was light. God called into being things which formerly did not exist and they served His good purposes. Everything God created was good. God looked at the light and saw it was good. God looked and man and woman and saw that they were good.

However man and woman and the rest of creation didn't stay so good. Through the Fall, darkness overshadowed God's good creation; the devil's temptation, Adam's sin and guilt, and the doom of death twisted, ruined, and darkened God's good beauty. This is why God sent His Son into the world, born from a woman, born under the Law, to redeem or enlighten creation; to bring new light where there is only darkness. As God was pleased when He first created all things and saw that they were good, so with

His Son conceived of the Spirit and born of the virgin, God is well pleased and is making all things new.

St. Mark tells the story of Jesus' Epiphany, or public manifestation, by focusing in upon the Baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan River. *4 And it happened that John the Baptizer was in the wilderness and he was preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the region of Judea and all Jerusalem kept on coming out to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River while they confessed their sins. 6 And John was clothed with the camel hairs and a leather belt was around his waist and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached saying, "The One greater than me comes after me, of whom I am not worthy while stooping to loose the straps of His sandals. 8 I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

9 And it happened in those days that Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee came and was baptized in the Jordan River by John. 10 And immediately when He rose up from the water He saw the splitting of the heavens and the Spirit as a dove descended into Him; 11 and a voice happened from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, with You I am well pleased."

St. Mark presents an obvious comparison and contrast between the people of Judea and Jerusalem with the person of Jesus. The people of Judea and Jerusalem are going out into the wilderness to receive a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins administered by John in Jordan River. Jesus does the same thing as the people in this respect; He too receives a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins by John in the Jordan River, but there are two important contrasts between how Mark describes Jesus' baptism and the baptism of all the people. First, all the people from Judea and Jerusalem are confessing their sins while they are baptized, but Jesus confesses nothing. Second, only Jesus' baptism is acclaimed by the splitting of the heavens, the descent of the Holy Spirit as a dove, and the voice of God.

St. Mark intends us to know that Jesus, Himself, is not a sinner, but one who came to be with sinners in order to redeem them, who stood knee deep in the same water as sinners. St. Mark wants us to know that Jesus is the one of whom John the Baptizer had spoken of, the One greater than he who would baptize with the Holy Spirit; he makes this known in dramatic fashion- the heavens split and the Spirit as a dove descends into Him, yes into Jesus, and He remains in Jesus. And finally St. Marks wants us to know with certainty that Jesus is the Son of God with whom God is well pleased in two senses: Jesus is the people of God, all Israel, God's chosen reduced to one, but unlike Israel of old this Son is faithful; and that Jesus is God in the flesh, the Son in whom God's reign has come to the earth.

God spoke a wonderful Word to Jesus at His baptism, *"You are My beloved Son, with You I am well pleased."* This Word carried Jesus forward in life and ministry to save sinners and bring light to those covered in darkness. This Word spoken from His heavenly Father comforted Him and gave Him peace in the midst of His sorrow and agony in the garden, as He prayed, *"Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Remove this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will"* (Mark 14:36). With the Holy Spirit in Him and the Word of the Father spoken to Him at His baptism Jesus endured betrayal, abandonment, and denial by those closest to Him. Anointed by the Spirit and

remembering His Father's Word, "*You are My beloved Son, with You I am well pleased,*" Jesus suffered and was crucified between two criminals. There on the cross the Son gave His life as the ransom for many; for the many sinners, even for you. Through all the pain, humiliation, and suffering, even when Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?," and when He breathed His last, Jesus recalled the Word that His Father had spoken in His baptism and He trusted in it, "*You are My beloved Son, with You I am well pleased.*"

God the Father has spoken a similar Word to you in your Baptism, as you were baptized in Jesus' death and resurrection, as you were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; to you, a sinner, God says, "For Christ Jesus' sake, I am well pleased you, My son, My daughter." In your Baptism God the Father was well pleased to give you the full benefits of His Son Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and new life now and in the Resurrection from the dead. God has spoken a Word of promise to you in Baptism that you can trust throughout your life, even in the midst of your guilt, sorrows, sufferings, losses, weaknesses, and death. Though all the world be against you, though your situation seem hopeless, though you be betrayed, abandoned, mocked, assailed, and persecuted, though you are depressed and think terribly of yourself, remember God's true Word spoken at your baptism, "For Christ Jesus' sake, I am will pleased with you, My son, My daughter."

This baptismal Word from God is what the Church needs to always remember and trust in; this baptismal Word of God is what our congregation (Holy Spirit Lutheran/Grace Lutheran) needs to always remember and trust in, but especially now in midst of our weaknesses- our small numbers of people and our financial deficiencies. By the Word of the Father, the faithful life, death, and resurrection of the Son, and the indwelling of the Spirit, the Church is created, lives, and grows. The Church is not created and sustained by me or you, by my efforts or yours, nor by music, money, advertising, or any other business principle. God creates and sustains the Church through His baptismal Word, through the faithful work of His Son, and through the calling, gathering, and indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Your identity and mine is not wrapped up and dependent upon the things that we do, the resolutions that we make, the things that we have or don't have. Your identity is in Christ Jesus into whose death and resurrection you and all the Church were baptized. God has said to you, "For Christ Jesus' sake, I am well pleased with you, My son, My daughter."

It is true that God does give His Church, even our congregation work to do. He has given us the task of loving one another and of serving our neighbors. God has called you to pray for the well-being your pastor and fellow members; to pray the Church and congregation would grow in faithfulness to Christ and in those being saved. God has called you to give tithes and offerings as He has enabled each of you to support those whose livelihood is from the Gospel and to care for the needs of the saints. God has called you to offer your mind, reason, body, and all your senses for the good of others, especially the members of this congregation. This is the work that God has given us

His dear children in whom He is well pleased to do. This is the work that as God's dear children in Christ we are joyful to do. But our work is not our life and identity.

Christ Jesus, the beloved Son of God in whom the Father is well pleased, the one who was baptized with sinners, the one who died for sinners, the one who is risen and now reigns, the one into whose death and resurrection we have been baptized is our life and identity. Jesus is the Light who has overcome the darkness of sin, death, and the devil. Jesus is the ransom for the many. Now God the Father says to in your baptism, "For the sake Christ Jesus, with you I am well pleased, My son, My daughter." Amen.