

The Baptism of Our Lord
Sunday, January 14, 2018

St. Mark 1:11, **“And a voice came from the heavens, ‘You are My beloved Son, with you I am well-pleased.’”**

Dear Christians,

I suppose every son or daughter wants the approval of their parents. They want to hear them say, “I love you.” They’d give anything for an, “I’m so pleased with you” from mom or dad. Back on the farm in Iowa it seemed like I was always messing up. As a young boy I wasn’t strong enough to open and shut the gates that allowed us to pass through the barbed wire fences. For the longest time I was too short to reach the clutch on the tractors—so I wasn’t very useful. The first time I actually went out in the field by myself I buried the back tires of the John Deere 3010 in some soft ground. I damaged a parking gear on our International 706 that cost my dad \$700.00 to repair—\$700.00 he didn’t have.

For a good chunk of my childhood I felt like a failure. Not that my dad wasn’t a good dad, he was. He just didn’t say “I love you” all that often and much of the time I didn’t feel like he was particularly pleased with me. As a father, I’m sure I could have done better with my own children.

When Jesus was baptized, God the Father gushed all over Him. Jesus, having been baptized by John, came up out of the Jordan River. And immediately there was a chain of events that happened. Jesus saw the heavens being torn open by God. Jesus saw the Holy Spirit descending on Him in the visible form of a dove. And then came the voice—the voice of God the Father saying to His eternal Son what every son wants to hear from his father. **“You are My beloved Son, with You I am well-pleased.”**

As much as we want our parents to say that to us, “You are my beloved son, my beloved daughter, with you I am well-pleased.” As much as we want our parents to say that to us, how much more do we want to hear our heavenly Father say that to us?

Sometimes it seems that all God says to us is how bad we are and how badly we’ve messed up. Sometimes it seems that all God tells us is how displeasing we are to Him and how displeasing our thoughts and words and deeds have been to him. God does say that to us. That’s called the Law. And it’s true!

God the Father says to us through the prophet Isaiah, **“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.”** God the Father, through mouth of King David, reminds us that we, like David, were brought forth in iniquity and conceived in sin by our mothers. Again David, in Psalm 14 writes, **“They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”** St. Paul writes, **“There is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** St. John writes, **“If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”**

God, in His Word, tells us that because of our sin and because of our sins we, in and of ourselves, are not pleasing to Him. Even the “best” among us are not deserving of His love. Instead we have earned His anger. We have merited His punishment. We have steered a course that leads us to damnation and destruction. That’s a fact.

But never, never does God the Father say of us sinners that He doesn’t love us. Even though our sin makes us displeasing to God, He still loves us. Even when we demonstrate daily that we are deserving of His wrath and anger, God still loves us. As St. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans, **“God demonstrates His love for us in this, that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”** St. John writes in His first letter the words that we heard again this past Christmas Eve, **“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice of for our sins.”**

Even when sin had made you and me displeasing to God, He loved us so much that He was determined to make us well-pleasing to Him once again. God loved us so much, that He hatched a plan, already in eternity, to save us from our sin, to deliver us from the punishment and the damnation and the destruction that we deserved.

That’s why Jesus was baptized. Jesus, God’s own and only beloved Son, came down from heaven. In the waters of the Jordan, Jesus, who was pleasing to the Father took upon Himself all of your sin, everything that made you or could ever make you displeasing to the Father. Already at the Jordan, Jesus was the spotless Lamb of God who had taken upon Himself and was taking away the sin of the world—your sin. As He stepped up out of the Jordan River, Jesus took His first steps toward Jerusalem, toward Calvary, toward the cross, toward suffering and death, toward your salvation.

There on the cross God the Father treated Jesus as though He did not love Him—although He did. On the cross God the Father treated Jesus as though He was not well-pleasing to Him—although He was. There on the cross Jesus received from His Father the anger, the wrath, the punishment, the death, and the hell that should have fallen on you and me and every sinner. There on the cross Jesus was treated by the Father as the sinner that He was not, but as the sinner that you are.

As Isaiah writes, **“He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him and by His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”** St. Paul echoes Isaiah, **“God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”**

On Easter Sunday, Jesus rose again from the dead. When He stepped out of the tomb He was still the same beloved Son of God who stepped out of the Jordan River. On the day of His resurrection, having borne our sin and taken it away, He was still as well-pleasing to the Father as He was on the day of His baptism.

Do you want to hear God the Father say to you, "You are my beloved son, my beloved daughter, with you I am well-pleased?" That's what He's saying to you in Jesus. He shouts it from the cross and the empty tomb of His beloved Son. Everything that made you displeasing to God was nailed to the cross with Jesus and has been left behind forever in His empty tomb.

And when you were baptized, what happened to Jesus happened to you. On the day of your baptism, heaven was torn open to receive you into the Father's very presence when you die and to give you access to His throne of grace even now. On the day of your baptism, the Spirit descended upon you to begin and to complete His sanctifying work in you. The Spirit who lives in you has set you off on a new life; a new life in which you trust in Jesus and love your neighbor; a new life lived free from sin's slavery and death's dominion; a new life lived to God.

But most importantly, on the day of your baptism God the Father said to you what He said to Jesus, "**You are My beloved son, with you I am well-pleased.**" On the day of your baptism, YOU became the "you" to whom the Father speaks from heaven. Clothed with Christ and adorned in His righteousness, the words of the Father to Jesus are now the words of the Father to you. The words first intended for His ears are now intended for your ears. In Jesus, you ARE God's beloved sons and daughters. In Jesus, you ARE well-pleasing to the Father.

God the Father doesn't just say that once. God the Father can't say it enough. Lest you forget it or should you doubt it, your heavenly Father shouts it into your ears and heart every time you remember your baptism. Every time you trace that cross over yourself and call on the name of the Triune God, God the Father is saying to you again, "**You are My beloved son, with you I am well-pleased.**"

Every time you confess your sins and receive the absolution, God the Father is saying to you again, "**You are My beloved son, with you I am well-pleased.**" Every time you hear the preaching of the Gospel, the proclamation of Christ's death for your sin and His resurrection for your salvation, God the Father is saying to you again, "**You are My beloved son, with you I am well-pleased.**" Every time you come to the Lord's Supper and eat and drink the very body that Jesus gave for you, the very blood that He poured out for your forgiveness, God the Father is saying to you again, "**You are My beloved son, with you I am well-pleased.**"

God the Father can't say it enough. You can't hear it enough. Those wonderful words to Jesus and to you who believe in Him and are baptized into Him. Dear Father, keep saying it and help us to keep hearing and believing it.

In Jesus' name
Amen