

Luke 3: 20-21: When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

"Welcome to the family!"

Our family took a wonderful trip to Houston – all six children and all six grandchildren. It was just amazing. The cousins played like they knew each other all their lives. You can tell from our pictures, because everyone was smiling almost all the time – from my 18 month old grandson to my 88 year old mother-in-law. We saw an alligator sunning at the park. We walked the beach and picked up shells. We toured a battleship and played with the big guns. In the whole week, I don't think any of our grandchildren experienced a "meltdown." We had so much fun!

I wish you could have been there. No, on second thought, I don't. You would have spoiled it. We would have had to put ourselves on our best behavior. We wouldn't have joked so much. I probably wouldn't have played the pie-in-the-face game. And you would have felt like you didn't belong. That's what families are like. You have to become part of the family to really feel as if you belong to the family.

Sometimes we don't feel like we belong to God's family. Sometimes it happens because someone in God's family treats us like an outsider instead of as a fellow believer in Jesus. But most of the time what makes us feel like we don't belong to God's family is our own sins. I've had people tell me they don't want to go to church because it makes them feel guilty. They are experiencing the awkwardness that sin puts in our heart when we think of the family of God. It's what made Adam and Eve run away from God in the Garden of Eden. They hid from God because they didn't feel like they belonged to God's family any longer.

The good news is that Jesus came to make you part of God's family. He came to rescue you from your guilt and fear. He gave us baptism so that we could become his brother and be adopted into his family. That's what we want to learn from the story of Jesus' baptism this morning.

1. Jesus' baptism teaches us about God's family

I'm talking about the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Maybe it's not the right analogy to talk about the Trinity as a family. But I don't know of any analogy that really perfectly describes what the Holy Trinity is all about. We know that there is only one God. The Bible teaches that clearly, over and over again. The Bible also teaches that there are three persons that make up our Triune God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three are here at Jesus' baptism. The Son of God stood in the water. The Spirit came down in the form of a dove and remained on Jesus and gave him power to do the work the Father sent him to do. The Father's voice came from heaven and said, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

This is the same Triune God that was present at creation in the beginning. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. In the beginning the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters – much the way a dove would hover in the sky. And the Word of God was there in the beginning. That's the Son of God, who was the Word made flesh. When God made Adam and Eve, the Bible says that God said, "Let us make man in our own image." If God were a one-person God, he would have said, "I am

going to make man in my image.” But because he is a three-person God, he said, “Let us make man in our image.”

Friends, can I get you to think about his really hard this morning? What did God do before he created the world? If God was only one person, it would have been really lonely out there in eternity. But our God is a three person God and a relational God from all eternity. We have a personal God who is three persons who existed in a relationship with each other from before time began. God loved his Son from eternity. The Holy Spirit glorified the Son from eternity. The Son honored the Father from eternity. Just as in a perfectly functional family on this earth, it is one for all and all for one, so it has been in our Triune God from eternity. Just as the full Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were united in thought and purpose at creation, so the whole Trinity is united in purpose for the saving of the world at Jesus’ baptism.

Are you still with me this morning? I need you to think about this some more, about what that means for us, who are God’s creation. God created man in his own image, in his own likeness. He created relational human beings who could become part of his family. He didn’t create robots to do his work in the garden. He didn’t create slaves whom he could use for his servants so that he would have someone to bow down and worship him. He created rational and relational beings whom he could love as a Father and who could walk with him as his children.

Do you see why God said about Adam in Genesis chapter 2 that it was not good for him to be alone, why he needed to make a helper suitable for him? God made Adam sleep a deep sleep and he created a woman out of the rib he took out of Adam. Adam said that this was now bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. Unlike the other animals, here was someone that Adam could relate to in a wonderful way, someone whom he could love and who could love him in return.

And then it happened. Sin came into the garden when Satan tempted Adam and Eve. It did so much damage to the relational part of who we are. It turned us from being loving and giving to being selfish and demanding. You’ve experienced that in your own family, because there is no perfect family. Husbands, sometimes you were so rude your wife didn’t even want to stay in the same room with you. Wives, sometimes you were so judgmental that your husband didn’t want to come home. And children, sometimes you were so mean to our brother or sister that they wished they had a different brother or sister. Do you see how sin can destroy what we long for most in our lives, which is peace and harmony in our families?

But worse than destroyed our relationship with each other, the sins you have committed make you feel like you don’t belong to God’s family anymore. We call that feeling guilt. But when I analyze what guilt really feels like, I think that it really feels most like a dark and hopeless loneliness before God. Think of how you felt the last time you committed an egregious sin against God. Unfortunately, even our small sins should make us feel that way, but we’ve become calloused and numb to so many of our sins. How did it make you feel? You didn’t want to talk to anyone. You didn’t want to come to church. You didn’t feel like singing or praying. You felt like you were cut off from God. Only guilt can make you feel that way.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus said on the cross. Do you see why he said that? He said that because in those hours he was carrying our guilt before God. He was enduring the eternal loneliness of someone who has been cut off from the most important relationship of all. He didn’t say “Father, why have you forsaken me?” He said, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” Here

at his baptism, the Father in heaven delights in his Son, in whom he was well pleased. But on the cross, God didn't delight in Jesus, because he was soaked through and through with the filth of our sins.

And this is what saves us, redeems us and gives us adoption into God's family. How does the story of Jesus' baptism connect us with that thought?

2. Jesus' baptism adopts us into God's family

In this story of Jesus' baptism, when he begins this three year ministry that would culminate in his death and resurrection, all three persons of the Triune God are there, and they are united in their purpose and resolve to rescue you from your sins. Sometimes I think we focus on Jesus so much that we do not think of the Father's work in this as well. (Although you could argue that we can never focus on Jesus too much!). But was the Father just standing by? Was he not emotionally involved in this?

I want you to think about the story of Abraham in the Old Testament, when God asked him to sacrifice his son, his one and only son, Isaac, on the mountain. For three days they traveled. When they left the servants behind and went on alone up the mountain, Isaac asked, "Dad, we have the wood, but what are we going to sacrifice?" Didn't that cut Abraham to the heart? Was the sacrifice of Isaac greater than the sacrifice of Abraham? I think we can argue that they were equal.

Can you imagine the emotional impact on God the Father, who was connected to his Son from all eternity? What was going through the heart of God in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus begged his Father to take this cup of suffering from him? What was in the heart of God, when his Son cried out in abandonment from the cross? What was in the heart of God, when Jesus closed his eyes in death? God the Father was fully committed when it came to saving you from your sins!

The Son was committed, the Father was committed, and so was the Holy Spirit. It says that he came to rest on Jesus in the form of a dove. Peter said in the book of Acts that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. In other words, the Holy Spirit put his full power behind this effort as well. Do you see that the whole Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are fully committed to your salvation? They are "all in." And to what end? The purpose of the Triune God is to adopt you into the family of God.

Paul makes that clear in Galatians 3: 26-27: **"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."** I hope you can memorize this passage and not forget it. This week, before you pray, recite it to yourself. It explains so beautifully how Jesus' baptism and our baptism is connected.

When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John, he didn't need to be baptized, the way we need to be baptized. Baptism is all about repentance and the forgiveness of sins, and Jesus didn't have any sins to repent of. He was from all eternity the perfect Son. When he came into this world and became one of us, he came to be our substitute before God. To be our substitute, he had to endure what we endure. He had to experience what we experience. He had to be tempted in every way that we are tempted. The only difference between Jesus and us is that he never sinned. He had to remain the perfect Son of God, which he did. That's why God the Father could say about Jesus, **"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."**

So if Jesus didn't need baptism, then why did Jesus want to be baptized? Our text gives us a clue when it says, **"When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too."** Jesus gave a clear

answer to John in the gospel of Matthew, when John at first didn't want to baptize Jesus. You can understand John's reluctance. After all, why should John baptize Jesus, when he wasn't even worthy to untie Jesus' shoes? Jesus said, "**Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness**" (Matthew 3.15). You see, Jesus submitted to baptism as our substitute. I like to think of it in this way. Jesus put himself into baptism so that we could take Jesus out of baptism.

Do you remember the verse? Can you say it with me? "**You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.**" By faith in Jesus and through your baptism, you have been clothed with Jesus. When God looks down from heaven upon you, he says, "You are my beloved son. You are my beloved daughter. In you I am well pleased." How can this be when we are filthy with sin? When we are corrupt on the inside? It is hard for us to believe, but it is true. God the Father only sees the righteousness of Jesus when he looks at you. You are his child by faith!

God the Son, Jesus, is fully committed to you in Baptism. God the Father is fully committed to being your Father in Baptism. God the Holy Spirit is also fully committed to you in your baptism. Listen to the words from our second lesson this morning. "**He (GOD) saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.**" (Titus 3:6-7) Your baptism wasn't just a one-time washing and renewing. The Holy Spirit did not show up on that day and then leave. The Holy Spirit has been poured out on you and has been working in your heart ever since.

That, dear friends, is why we never have to remain in the guilt and loneliness of our sins. When you feel that way, then think of your Baptism and what it means. Our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is fully committed to you and has adopted you into his family. Amen.