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Baptism of Our Lord

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, this year I turn 49. It is my last year in my forties. Next year I will be the big FIVE-O.

And it seems that the years are ticking off quicker and quicker...48...49...50...

It seems that time goes by quicker as we age.

I am sure you yourself have noticed this.

And I heard an interesting explanation about why that is the case, about why time goes by faster as we age.

You see, it is all relative.

When we are younger, say 8 years old, time can seem like eternity.

Waiting for Christmas or for a birthday can seem to take forever.

The reason being is that a year is the equivalent of one eighth of our life, and so time can seem to just creep along.

To be sure, we are waiting one eighth of our lifetime.

But when we are say fifty years old, one year is one fiftieth of our life.

And so, to wait one year is to wait only one fiftieth of our lifetime.

And so when we are older it appears as though time just flies by.

PAUSE

It was the best explanation I had ever heard to explain that difference in experience regarding the passing of time.

But regardless of how we try to explain it, it is true that our lives go by so very quickly.

How does the Psalmist describe it?

The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

70, 80, even 90 years is nothing in the grand scheme of things.

We have our existence on this planet for what is just a split moment.

PAUSE

Now, I don't know about you, but I have found myself as of late, starting to gauge the passing of time, by the amount of time that has passed since the theatrical release of particular movies.

Have you ever done this?

This year, for instance, the movies *Jerry Maguire*, *Twister*, and *Independence Day* are all celebrating their 25th anniversary.

The Silence of the Lambs is celebrating its 30th anniversary.

Ferris Bueller's Day Off and *Top Gun* are celebrating their 35th anniversary.

Raiders of the Lost Ark is celebrating its 40th anniversary.

I can still remember seeing that movie as a 9-year-old kid and afterwards pretending to be Indiana Jones.

The opening segment where Harrison Ford's character has to outrun the rolling boulder still captures my attention.

Was that really 40 years ago?

For those a little older...

The movie *Rocky* is celebrating its 45th anniversary.

West Side Story its 60th anniversary.

And *It's a Wonderful Life* is celebrating its 75th anniversary.

And then I begin to think about the actors and actresses in those movies who are not with us any more.

PAUSE

Now, I bring all this up, not to depress us.

I bring all this up, not to get us down.

But I do want to remind us of the truth that our time on this planet is very short.

And, the apostle Paul from the Bible was acutely aware of how short our time is.

In fact, he believed that our present reality was all the more short because he believed that Jesus' return was imminent.

That in fact, Jesus would return in his lifetime.

Yes, the apostle Paul felt that Jesus would soon break in upon our world, and this world would be changed.

Jesus was soon going to be returning, and life as we have known it would be transformed.

Now, that, of course, didn't happen.

Jesus didn't return within the lifetime of the apostle Paul.

But that still doesn't change the fact that life is short, and it is only the other side of life, we will indeed meet our Lord and God.

So, in this way, the coming of Christ is still very imminent.

It is only as long as our lifespan...

It is only as far away as our last breath...

And then...and then... in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we shall all be changed, and we will meet the Lord.

PAUSE

Now, all this thinking about our immortality, and of us standing then before God...all of this has a way of working on us.

As so a pastor, I sometimes get the question, "How can I be sure, Pastor?"

“How can I be sure, Pastor, I am in good standing with God?”

“How can I be sure of I will not be condemned?”

“How can I be sure of my salvation?”

Sometimes, we do get concerned, don't we?

Sometimes, we wonder what will happen when we die, if we will be saved?

Sometimes, when we stop and think about our mortality, the little voice inside us questions whether God loves us, whether God will save us?

It's a nagging question.

It is a bothersome thought.

And that is why I think we recognize this day on the church calendar.

This is why we observe the festival of the Baptism of our Lord.

Because this...this day reminds us, sisters and brothers in Christ.

This day reminds us that we are baptized, and that we are in good standing with God.

And yes, you might be thinking to yourself...so what if I have been baptized?

So what if a little water was sprinkled on my head while some words were spoken?

How did that change my standing with God?

How did that assure my salvation?

PAUSE

To which, I would reply that baptism ...baptism is a visible sign of what God has already done in all of our lives.

You see, baptism is the sign of God's grace for us in Jesus Christ.

Baptism is the sign of God's gift of life and salvation that is promised to all the world through the death and resurrection of Jesu Christ.

Baptism is the sign of that which occurred 2000 years ago, but which is still made real for us today.

Baptism is the sign that what God did for all the world in Christ Jesus on a cross in Jerusalem...

Baptism is the sign that what God did in Christ is made personal for us.

Baptism is the sign that we are in good standing with God.

For we see that baptism is the sign that Jesus crossed the River Jordan, the River in which he was baptized.

Baptism is the sign that Jesus crossed the River Jordan, like the Israelites long before had crossed the River Jordan and entered the Promised Land.

Baptism is the sign that Jesus crossed the River Jordan, and has led us his people to freedom, like Moses had led the Israelite people to freedom when he crossed the Jordan.

Baptism is the sign that we are free.

Baptism is the sign that we are free not from enslavement in Egypt, like the Israelites before.

But baptism is the sign that we are free from the bondage to sin and death.

Baptism is the sign that we are free, that we are in good standing with God, that we have the promise of salvation.

As Jesus crossed the River Jordan when he was baptized in the River, so too have we crossed over.

Baptism is the sign, sisters and brothers in Christ.

Baptism is the sign of what has already taken place.

And so it is not the water, and it is not the words that save.

No, it is the promise in the words connected to what God has already done, which saves us.

And this is the promise...

Christ has come into this world.

Christ has suffered and died for us.

And Christ has been raised to new life.

And because we are intimately connected to our Lord...

Because we have our existence in Christ...

And because we need a visible reminder to cling to, to remind us of God's promise, God gives us the gift of baptism.

PAUSE

And, Friends, this is how God works, as we have seen in the Bible.

This is how God works.

God attaches a sign to any and every promise he makes.

The sign of the rainbow was attached to God's promise never to flood the earth again.

The sign of the circumcision was attached to God's promise of the covenant to establish a great nation.

The sign upon Cain, who cried out to God for protection against those who would want to exact revenge upon him for killing his brother Abel.

God "marked" Cain as a sign of God's promise to protect him.

Some speculate that the mark God put on Cain is not unlike the cross made on the forehead of a baptized person.

So, we see, this is how God works.

This is God's M.O., God's method of operating.

God attaches a sign to each promise he makes.

And the sign of baptism is attached to God's promise that in Christ Jesus, in his death and resurrection, we have the certain hope of salvation.

This is God's promise, already accomplished for all people.

Baptism is just the sign that that promise is made personal for each of us.

PAUSE

And so, if and when that nagging question comes upon us.

If and when we are bothered by that thought...

Am I in good standing with God?

Am I saved?

How do I know?

Remember...remember your baptism.

Remember your baptism, not because it is baptism that saves us, but because it is the sign that God has already saved you when he sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world.

That is the power of this day in the life of the church year.

That is the message of this festival the Baptism of our Lord.

This day is a comfort, a reminder of God's promise in Jesus Christ.

Yes, on this day, we remember that Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan.

But we also remember our own baptism.

And so what's it matter if we are 49 or 50, 60 or 70, 80 or 90...

What's it matter our age? What's it matter if life here is short?

In Christ Jesus there is eternity, an eternity that in fact has already begun because of the promise.

Baptism is a sign of this good news.

You are not an age, but you are a person of eternity.

Thanks be to God. Amen.