

“Bless You”

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

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This morning our attention is drawn to the baptism of Jesus. We join with Christians around the world who will focus upon this dramatic event in Jesus' life as they recall their own baptism.

You will find a description of the baptism of Jesus, with varying details, in the first three gospels. Mark, the earliest gospel writer, set up the baptism by introducing his readers to John the Baptist, the last Old Testament prophet and the forerunner of Jesus. Mark described John as a simple, humble man who lived the life of a Bedouin. In spite of this, there is no mention in Mark of John feeling unworthy to baptize Jesus.

Matthew is the writer who shared John's feelings as he described the dialogue that occurred in the Jordan River between John and Jesus. Matthew highlights John's reluctance to baptize Jesus and Jesus' insistence that he do so 'to fulfill all righteousness.'

Luke took a completely different approach from Matthew and Mark. He did not even mention John the Baptist when he informed his readers of Jesus' baptism. By the time he got around to writing about Jesus' baptism, John had been arrested by Herod and was soon to be executed. Clearly, Luke used Jesus' baptism to signal the end of John's ministry and the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

There is one major detail all three writers include, though. It is the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism and the words of a proud Father, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you, I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22)

Obviously, this heavenly blessing was important to all three writers. Why? I think they recognized how much Jesus needed it and how much it meant to him.

Why did Jesus need to hear these words? He had just accepted the biggest challenge of his life, and he needed to know God was pleased with his decision and was going to be close by his side.

What was Jesus going to do? He was going to embark on his public ministry where he would make hope visible to many living in despair. He would spend the remainder of his days on earth reaching out to the lonely, forgotten people who were struggling to survive.

He would leave the comforts of home where he spent his days in safety and obscurity making furniture in his father's carpenter shop to travel the dusty Palestinian roads, listening to people's stories and addressing their needs. He would heal the sick, encourage the discouraged, comfort the grieving, offer guidance to the lost, give advice to the confused and forgive sinners so they could rebuild their lives.

Everywhere he would go, he would reveal the nature and heart of God in word and deed. Everything he taught and preached would be backed up by what he did, even under the most adverse circumstances.

In addition, he would confront the leaders who were abusing their power by exploiting the people they were called to serve. He would expose their hypocrisy and addictions to power, prestige, attention, control and money, pleading with them to repent.

Nothing about his future would remotely resemble his past. He was giving up the familiar for the unfamiliar, a home for no place to lay his head and a supportive family and loving neighbors for people who would reject him and his message.

Why would Jesus do this? Why would he accept a challenge that came with such a high price?

He listened to the stories of people in the marketplace who told him how hard life was and how tired they were. He listened to the last Old Testament prophet, John, as he declared

the time for hope and change had come, and he challenged people to prepare their hearts and look for God's anointed messenger. He listened to his own heart, which was tugging him to use his many skills and talents for a higher purpose.

As a result, Jesus hung up the tools in the carpentry shop for a final time, said goodbye to his skeptical family and headed to the Jordan River to stand in line with all the other common folk who came to ask for God's blessing and guidance as they headed in new directions.

"You are my Son, whom I love; with you, I am well pleased," Jesus heard as he was praying after his baptism.

What do you think this blessing did for Jesus? I am not sure words can adequately describe what it meant to him and did for him.

It had to affirm the radical and costly decision he made and inspire him to give his best. Surely it gave him confidence and courage, knowing he had God's support. Down the road, the memory of this moment had to help Jesus stay on course and remain faithful when he encountered resistance and danger.

Blessings are this powerful, as Dr. Myron Madden reminded us through his monthly articles in *Home Life*. For twenty-seven years, Dr. Madden, a Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the Louisiana State Medical Center, wrote articles under the title, 'Questions and Answers'. Frequently, he encouraged his readers to do for their family members and friends what God did for Jesus the day he was baptized—offer a blessing. He believed strongly in expressing unconditional love and encouragement to family members and friends, especially when they were moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

Who needs you to do this today? Whose future could be influenced by knowing of your love and support? Is it a family member, a school mate, a co-worker, a fellow church member or a neighbor?

Is it someone starting a new job or heading to school away from home?

Is it someone reeling from a mistake that is trying to put the broken pieces of their life back together?

Is it someone struggling with an addiction who has entered a rehab facility?

Is it someone trying to regain their composure and self-esteem after it was shattered by the cruel words of judgmental people?

Is it someone traveling on a lonely and unfamiliar path after the death of their mate?

Is it someone facing an uncertain future after their once promising marriage ended in divorce?

Is it someone facing hard economic times after their business failed?

Is it someone headed back to school to prepare for a new and better career?

What impact could a blessing from you have upon them? Ask Jesus. I believe he can tell you all you need to know.