

Introductory

This text has synoptic parallels in Matthew (3:1-12) and Luke (3:2-17). In addition, the John A devotes almost a full chapter (1) to the work of John B, and John 1:19-28 is the appointed reading for Advent 4 in the TLH one-year lectionary. In LW, this text is read on Advent 2B, the Matthew and Luke texts (3: 1-3) are appointed for years A and C.

On Advent 3, the reading for series B in LW is from John 1, and the remainder of the Luke reading (3:7-18) is appointed for series C. In LSB, the appointed readings are the same as the ones for LW for series A and B, but LSB combines the Luke readings from LW and adds to them, appointing Luke 3:1-14 (15-20) to be read on Advent 2.

We began the B Series Church Year last week, and Mark will be the prominent synoptic Gospel this year. He writes for a Roman audience. Of the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew and Luke are the others), Mark's is by far the shortest. The longer or shorter ending is the subject of much scholarly debate, as is Mark's omission of a birth narrative.

There are a lot of ideas float around as to why this seemingly glaring omission, ranging from Mark making a statement about class to a very class-conscious Roman audience, to him trying to say to us that the new birth of Baptism is more important than one's physical birth, to pointing out that Matthew had been written and the readers could see his or Luke's Gospel if they wanted to know about the birth of Jesus, to Mark was not around when Jesus was born and "you write what you know," to the mention of "son" in v.1 implies birth, to more simple reasons that have to do with the cost of writing materials and space limitations. I come down firmly in the camp that claims ignorance; we – or at least I - don't really know why Mark does not include a birth narrative. Moving on...

You may want to review the John A/John B thing. This account is about John B, and not about John the A. This John and Jesus were related and very close in age, and this incident takes place when they are both about thirty years old. The Apostle John and Jesus were first cousins – their mothers were sisters – and he wrote five NT books.

We have talked before about the location of John's preaching and the Baptism at "the other Bethany," not the suburb of Jerusalem but the Bethany up north, where the Jordan River enters the Galilean Sea, an area Jesus would later frequent. The place is inhabited, but John's work takes place in the wilderness, we would say "out in the country."

The tension between society, which is gearing up for Christmas, and the Church, which is trying to observe the Advent Season, is increasing. As time goes by it just seems to get

harder. I suppose there's something to be said to speaking to what's on peoples' minds, but if we don't carry the torch for the Advent Season, then it will be snuffed out.

A theme that might include Christmas would be one that deals with the various comings of Jesus, including His birth, His coming to us these days in Word and Sacrament, and His Second Coming. And speaking of carrying torches, how about carrying the one that has us responding to, "happy holidays" with a hearty, "Merry Christmas!"

Textual Notes

1. Mark starts at the very beginning, generally a very good place to start, "Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ Υἱοῦ Θεοῦ - the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God." Well, that's sort of the beginning. The other synoptics have birth accounts of Jesus that are different, and so – in his own special Johannine way – does John.

That tells you how important Mark – whose Gospel is the shortest – thought the nativity of Jesus was. (Luke also gives us the account of the twelve-year-old Jesus in Temple.) As you may know, the date of the birth of Jesus was not paid attention to until early in the 4th Century, during the time of the Christological Controversies and the Nicaea Council.

Mark begins with the beginning of what is generally known as the "Public Ministry" of Jesus, which began when He came to be baptized by John the Baptizer. Prior to that – the Temple incident aside – He was probably little noticed outside of Nazareth. I contend that his family, playmates, and the town folk would have noticed the perfect child.

"Jesus" and "Christ" are Greek words of Hebrew origin. Jesus means "savior" or "one who saves" and "Christ" means "anointed" or "one anointed." Messiah, Christ, and Anointed are therefore synonymous. Work fun facts like that into the sermon, and it will help people to better understand what the Bible says when they're reading on their own.

Mark also, in that first sentence, calls Jesus "the Son of God," a lofty title as well. All of those terms occur in the OT, and all of them are messianic in nature. He calls what he is about to relate to the reader "τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ – the Gospel of Jesus Christ." That word occurs seventy-six times in the NT, and it means "good news."

Bible Scholars talk about how "gospel," in the wider sense, means the entirety of the teachings of Jesus, including Law and Gospel. In the narrow sense it means particularly and exclusively the good news that Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins. Here Mark clearly is using the term in the wider sense, to refer to all the teachings of Jesus.

2. Then Mark talks about "Καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν τῷ Ἠσαΐᾳ – as it has been written in Isaiah," and then quotes words that appear to be from Malachi and Isaiah. Some manuscripts leave out Isaiah and replace it with "ἐν τοῖς προφήταις – in the prophets." This verse is taken from the Prophet Malachi (3:1), who is not Isaiah the Prophet.

The idea expressed in verse two can also be found in Isaiah (57:14), which *was* written by Isaiah, although the Malachi reference is much closer to the wording Mark uses. We could, therefore, conclude that when Mark talks about Isaiah, he is talking in verse one about an *idea* expressed by Isaiah and in verse two is *quoting from him directly*.

But I don't think Mark included the word "Isaiah" in his original writing. He talked about the writings of the unspecified "prophets," plural, and that could be Isaiah, or Malachi, or I think in this case both. You can reference the apparatus in Nestle-Aland to see the variant readings, but in this case it's not very helpful. That happens sometimes.

Let's move on then to the different English New Testaments, which are in this case are quite helpful. It is noteworthy that all of the King James Versions leave the word "Isaiah" out, and speak only of "the prophets," plural. It is even more noteworthy that the Textus Receptus, from which the 1611 KJV was translated, leaves out "Isaiah"

The Textus Receptus (received text) has "τοῖς προφήταις" (the prophets), which is why KJV has it the way that it does. What is most noteworthy is that almost all the compiled Greek Testaments leave out "Isaiah," and have "τοῖς προφήταις," making the quote from the writings of unnamed plural prophets, like Malachi as well as Isaiah.

I'm not sure if it's as, or even at all noteworthy that the few compiled (complete) Greek Testaments that *do* specify "the prophet" as being "Isaiah," which I have said is wrong, are more new than old. We have already noted that it is the more modern translations that include "Isaiah," maybe based on the more modern Greek Testaments, maybe not.

I haven't translated the entire Greek NT into the English – yet so I don't know how those people think, but I always wonder about the liberal bias that so permeates biblical scholarship, including translations of the Bible. In this case, I wonder if somebody wanted the English-speaking reader to see "Isaiah," and look up the verse in the OT.

The reader would then see that the quote is more from Malachi than it is from Isaiah and conclude that the Bible indeed *does* contain errors. There are lots of unfaithful pastors who would lead them to that very conclusion in Adult Bible Class. Far from being a conspiracy theory, it's my observation of what goes on with True Believers in falsehood.

The verb for writing, "γέγραπται," is in the perfect tense, indicating past action with results that continue on. The prophets had written several hundreds of years in the past, and their words, God's Words, which are in the case of those quoted messianically prophetic words, are still continuing to be proclaimed in Mark's time and in ours.

In fact, those words written by the OT Prophets and the NT Apostles et al are still being used by God to make Christians. It was Phillip's reading from Isaiah that God used to cause the Ethiopian Eunuch to be converted (Acts 10:26ff). It was the Word of God that was the means of Creation, and it is that same Word that will endure when all else passes.

The OT prophets have God saying, “Ἰδοὺ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου – Look! I will send my messenger in front of your face.” The verb translated “send” is “ἀποστέλλω,” from which comes “Apostle,” and the singular noun “messenger” or “angel” is “ἄγγελόν,” which is often rendered “angel,” but clearly here refers to a person.

As we will see soon enough that term refers specifically to John the Baptizer, “ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου – who will prepare the road.” Luke includes more detail about the preparations, and you are no doubt familiar with the excavation operations that preceded the arrival of a king or other dignitary in Bible times.

This preparation would make a fine homiletical metaphor, and if you can point to a current or recent construction project, preferably one involving road-building, that would help the listener to better understand the concept of preparing the road for the dignitary, like putting out the red carpet or doing a security sweep or mowing the grass.

The Lincoln Highway used to run through Grand Mound, Iowa. There are markers through town, and on the gravel road over to Calamus to the west. It had nothing to do with coming dignitaries, but at some point, Highway 30 became a straighter concrete road that now skirts the town. There is talk again of widening it to four lanes.

Four miles to the east, towards Clinton, it is four lane divided highway. The current west bound lanes used to carry both east and westbound traffic, and there are a lot of hills, especially nearer to Clinton. The newer east bound – you can see that they took out almost all the hills, even nearer to Clinton. I will probably talk about that on Sunday.

The idea of Christianity as “the way” or “the road” – I have begun get away from the former term and move towards the latter – is most prominent in John, and it carries through to the NT. It actually has OT roots; the Psalmists especially speak in terms of the Christian life as being a journey along a path or a road, and your hearers know that it is.

3. Having been told (2) that the messenger will “prepare the road,” now we are told that such preparation will be by word, not by moving around dirt. Hear “φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ - voice crying in the wilderness.” The verb “βοῶντος – crying” is the relatively rare (four NT occurrences) present active participle form of the very common verb βοάω.

That word would have been used to refer to an announcement or public proclamation, and the preparation is for none other than “The Lord.” The location of that voice that is crying out is given as “ἐρήμῳ – in the wilderness,” the place of sin and suffering, Satan’s abode, and you have to wonder if this isn’t a reference to Jesus’ Wilderness Temptation.

Except that the next verse (4) has John in the Wilderness. John, the messenger of God will be taking the Word of God right to the heart of the enemy, onto his home court, where he will slam-dunk the Baptism of Jesus in his face, “Ετοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν Κυρίου, εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ - prepare the road of the Lord, make His path straight.”

The noun “τρίβους – path,” occurs only three times (in the synoptic accounts of this) in the NT, and it means “a beaten track, a path.” The significance of the word is,

tribos (from *tribō*, "to rub") – properly, a rut (path) formed by *rubbing* (constant use); (figuratively) the "route" established by the Lord, where people can best know Him. This is also a *regular* path that all saints must travel in their spiritual journey (romance) of knowing God. It is the "road of faith," which God equally extends to all people, so all can know Him for who He really is (personally grasping His attributes, cf. Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8) (© Helps Ministries).

4. So we have John the Baptizer, the Prophet prophesied about by the Prophets, and “ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτίζων ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ - John came, baptizing in the Wilderness. The aorist indicative middle verb ἐγένετο, “he came,” not “he appeared,” indicates conscious action on his part. The site for his preaching had been chosen randomly, but deliberately.

John knows who he is, and knowing who he is, John knows where he should go. He should go to the wilderness, where the Prophets long ago had said he would be. How did John know who he was? Well, there were the things that the angel Gabriel had said to Zechariah about him, things that we must suppose Zechariah passed on to John?

And it wasn't just John's father. Everybody knew that Zechariah had been stricken mute, and they knew that something was up, and no doubt John had heard that story too. And then there was the meeting between Elizabeth and Mary, where John “leaped for joy” in the womb at the presence of Jesus. Only after John was born could Zechariah talk again.

And in fact Luke (1:65-66) says that “all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea,” and that the talk, and John, got peoples' attention. In the wilderness, John is said to be doing something and saying something, both actions described using verbs in the present active participial form, continual or habitual action.

John is “κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν – preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” What does that mean? The sentence structure has the noun “baptism” in the accusative case (predicate), followed by the noun “repentance” in the genitive case, the case most commonly used to indicate possession.

Both verbs are in the attributive position, meaning that they say something about a characteristic or “attribute” of the person who is the subject of the sentence. John was doing, and John was saying. It says of John that he was “βαπτίζων – washing.” He was also “κηρύσσων – preaching,” the word for public proclamation of the Gospel.

It was part and parcel of John that he would be baptizing and that he would be proclaiming, a concept that a pastor ought to be able to grasp, since that is also part and parcel of who we are. What to we do? We administer the Sacraments. What do we say? We preach the Gospel. Jesus also did (miracles) and said (preaching and teaching).

Baptism and Repentance

As to the matter of “repentance” being in the genitive case, in the English language, the addition the letter “s” – often preceded by an apostrophe – to the end of a noun is most commonly used to express the genitive case indicating possession. The genitive case can have a number of different uses besides possession, and that’s all I’m going to say.

On p. 257 of FGG, you will see, besides possession, a listing of seven other possible usages for the genitive case in the Greek language. Of those, the one that makes the most sense here (with repentance) is the fifth, the genitive case used “to express the idea of object when the genitive noun stands as an object to a noun whose root is verbal action.”

The explanation given for the meaning of the example phrase there is essentially the same explanation that we would give for the meaning of the phrase we find here in Mark. Allow me to quote the author, substituting our phrase, which includes “baptism” in the nominative case and “repentance” in the genitive case. I’m going somewhere with this.

“Here, behind βάπτισμα stands the verbal root βαπτίζω and the idea of repentance. ‘Repentance’ (μετανοίας) is what is believed, not what does (in this case receives) the baptism.” I’m still going somewhere with this, and I’m’ speaking to the Anabaptist idea that first come belief and repentance, and then after that comes “believer’s baptism.”

They will wrongly use this verse as a proof text, citing the English translations, which do not make clear that the *idea* of repentance is not necessarily a precursor or preparatory to Baptism, like the Anabaptists teach. To clarify “they,” the “Ana” has been removed from their modern designating name, and then check out how the Confessions speak of them.

In this verse, the grammar clearly presents repentance as being very closely connected to and with Baptism. It is the person who believes in the *idea* of repentance and who *is in fact* repentant who receives Baptism. If you don’t believe in the idea of repentance, then you can’t be repentant, and you have no reason to be baptized – and they aren’t.

As far as the question of Infant Baptism, Baptism and repentance are like the chicken and the egg. The whole, “which came first...” question works because of the very close symbiotic relationship between the chicken and the egg. When all is said and done, when it comes to chickens and eggs, it’s not about whether the chicken comes first or the egg.

It’s about that relationship between those two. In fact, you can’t have one without the other. Baptism and repentance are like that, and “which came first” is the wrong question whose answers produce bad theology, like theology that denies the gifts given in Baptism to the weakest and most vulnerable among us and think themselves more spiritual for it.

You probably didn’t even notice what I just did. I took a rather difficult concept and explained it using Greek words and the language of grammar for those who have a

workable knowledge of Greek and grammar. Then I explained it in a way that was more understandable to non-Greek readers who may or may not know a lot of grammar.

Finally, I used the figure of speech known as simile to help all readers to better get a grasp on the concept. I do not say these things to be boastful, but to point out an example of how in preaching we should do the same thing, and the better we do that, the better more hearers will be able to understand what we are saying.

Repentance (μετάνοια) means change, a change from trusting self to trusting God for salvation and all things, a change from living the life of the Old Adam to living the New Man in Christ, and that's sort of what Christianity is all about. This Baptism that is intimately connected to repentance is said to be "εἰς into" the forgiveness of sins."

In the Greek language, the specific meaning of the preposition εἰς varies depending on the case of the noun towards which movement is being made. The noun translated "forgiveness" is "ἄφεσιν," the accusative case of ἄφεσις, a word that indicates pardon or release, and the accusative case indicates metaphorical movement "into" or "towards."

The Baptism of John, the one that is intimately connected to repentance, moves one into a state of forgiveness or pardon, and that's a very good state in which to find oneself. The Baptism of John does not mean nothing. Indeed, it does mean something, and clearly lives were changed by it, but the Baptism of Jesus supersedes it, so that's the one we use.

Jesus did not bring objects from home, and neither do I, but do talk a lot about things familiar to the hearer, like Jesus does. I seem to end up talking about cars from the pulpit a lot. The Model T was not nothing. It was something, a good car, affordable, it beat walking, and you never had to feed or water it or clean up the manure off the street.

The Classics of the 50s were a big step forward, but if you ride in one today you can hardly bear the poor suspension, manual steering, and no air conditioning! My 2017 Rav4 is incredible: great handling, AWD, the car can read to me from the phone, and under most conditions, it can actually drive itself. The Baptism of John is a Model T.

5. When Mark says that "καὶ ἐξεπορεύετο πρὸς αὐτὸν πᾶσα ἡ Ἰουδαία χώρα καὶ οἱ Ἱεροσολυμεῖται πάντες – and going out to him all the region of Judea and all Jerusalem went out" – he is using the figure of speech known as hyperbole, exaggeration, sort of like when you say "I'm so hungry that I could eat a horse," but you never actually do.

People always like to talk about the numbers, and Lutherans these days like to focus on the small number of followers towards the end of the life of Jesus, and they like to point out that at Pentecost the raw numbers may be large, but the percentage is small. For most of His Public Ministry, Jesus was a big deal, and so was John, sort of like today.

Christianity is the largest religion in the world – the number 2.3 billion comes up first – and in many places, numbers are rising. I get it, not all of those people are Confessional Lutherans. As a percentage, we are statistically insignificant. Nor are all those who identify as “Christian” very good Christians, and not all of them are going to heaven.

Are you saying...I’m just saying.

So, they came, “καὶ ἐβαπτίζοντο ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ποταμῷ ἐξομολογούμενοι τὰς ἁμαρτίας – and those who came were baptized by John in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.” The verb “ἐξομολογούμενοι – confessing” is a present active participle. No great shakes: The confession of sins is an integral aspect of repentance and forgiveness.

6. We get some information about what kind of a man John was. The common portrayal of John the Baptizer has him as some kind of half-baked fiery-eyed screwball who when he is preaching is seen to be toeing the line just barely this side of sanity. To be sure, if one is to be a prophet of God, one will often have a bit of an edge to him. Couldn’t hurt.

Many of the prophets mentioned in the Bible had that edge, as do many modern-day prophets, but let’s give John the respect that he deserves as the last OT and the first NT prophet, the one who was a faithful preacher of the Word, who baptized multitudes, and who first introduced the world to Jesus the Christ, and who was a lot like me and you.

John is wearing clothing made of camel’s hair, and a leather belt. The thing about his garment is what it was not. He is not wearing the clothing not of a great classical orator, as might have been expected since he was clearly a good talker, but of a simple man who lived in the country, who did not have a tailor, but bought off the rack at Penney’s.

While it is out there, we don’t normally see clothing made from camel’s hair these days, but historically it has been a common material from which clothing is made, and it has to be more comfortable to wear than wool is. When you do see camel-hair clothing these days, it’s seen as rather hoity toity. In the days of John, it was just the opposite.

Nor is there anything particularly profound about a man wearing a leather belt. I, for example, wear a leather belt every day of the week. So does my wife and everybody else. The most noteworthy thing about John’s clothing is that it was the same as Elijah’s, who “wore a garment of haircloth, with a girdle of leather around his loins” (2 Kings 1:8).

His diet is said to include locusts and wild honey, both ceremonially clean (see Lev. 11: 22 for locusts) and both found in the wilderness. If you remember Fear Factor with Joe Rogan, that’s how most Americans view eating insects, but in the Middle East consuming them is very common, and honey is nature’s sweetener, today supplanted by other things.

The commentaries all have something to say (see Matthew 3:4). Ellicott says,

His raiment of camel’s hair – The dress was probably deliberately adopted by the Baptist as reviving the outward appearance of Elijah, who was “a

hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather” ([2Kings 1:8](#)); and the “rough garment,” that had been characteristic of the prophet’s life even at a later period ([Zechariah 13:4](#)), as contrasted with the “long garments” of the Pharisees ([Mark 12:38](#)), and the “gorgeous apparel” of the scribes who attached themselves to the court of Herod ([Luke 7:25](#)). The Nazarite vow of [Luke 1:15](#) probably involved long and shaggy hair as well.

Locusts and wild honey.—Locusts were among the articles of food permitted by the Law ([Leviticus 11:21](#)), and were and are still used by the poor in Palestine and Syria. They are commonly salted and dried, and may be cooked in various ways, pounded, or fried in butter, and they taste like shrimps. It is needless, when the facts are so clear, to go out of the way to seek the food of the Baptist in the sweet pods of the so-called locust-tree (*Ceratonía Siliqua*), with which it has been sometimes identified. The “wild honey” was that found in the hollows of trees (as in the history of Jonathan, [1Samuel 14:25](#)), or in the “rocks” ([Deuteronomy 32:13](#); [Psalm 81:16](#)). Stress is laid on the simplicity of the Baptist’s fare, requiring no skill or appliances, the food of the poorest wanderer in the wilderness, presenting a marked contrast to the luxury of the dwellers in towns.

7. We are now told more specifically of what the preaching of John consisted, “καὶ ἐκήρυσσεν λέγων Ἔρχεται ὁ ἰσχυρότερός μου ὀπίσω μου, οὗ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἰκανός – and he was preaching, saying, (here) comes the stronger (one) than me after me, of whom I am not sufficient” to bend down and untie His sandals, a serving, menial task.

John’s preaching was not about self, but from the beginning about Jesus. Mark again used the common word (ἐκήρυσσεν) for the public proclamation of the Gospel, and John spoke of one who would come after (ὀπίσω) him in time, and who is “stronger” or “more powerful” than he. He then uses what may have been an idiom about untying sandals.

Because idioms are understood by the people in a particular time and place, but not necessarily by others, it’s hard to say. There are idioms in the Bible whose meanings are hard to understand – the camel through the eye of the needle is much talked about – but the meaning of this statement is clear. John B was older than Jesus, but Jesus is God.

For the younger audience, you might have to explain tying shoes or sandals. Then we can talk about how people in those days wore sandals, and how when a visitor came to your house in those days his sandals would be removed by the lowest of the domestic help, and maybe his feet would also be washed. John thinks self is unworthy of that task.

The Great Orator John, the one with Rock Star street buzz, is putting himself into the position of that lowliest of all servants with his talk about untying the sandals of Jesus. Christians could learn a lot from John the Baptizer, the very popular preacher, who understood that it wasn’t about him, but that it is about Jesus, and so could Pastors.

The Christian who is flattered when people talk about how good of a person he is ought to remember that nobody knows better than he does the depth of his sin, and that his salvation comes only by the work of Christ, Who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give Himself as a ransom, Who saves us who are utterly helpless to save self.

Pastor ought to keep in mind that things like the pulpit, the clerical collar, the vestments, and even being addressed properly by people are placed there for a reason. These things are to remind him and to communicate to others the removal his own personality, his own individualism, because it's not about him. So why are you wearing a suit?

The pastor or other Christian who understands that our role in conversion is to point the finger at Jesus gets it, and the one who draws attention to self does not. Point your finger to Jesus and to the place where He is found, in Word and Sacrament, and you will do well, and you may even be there to watch as God makes Christians out of unbelievers. .

A lot has been written about the Baptism of John and the Baptism of Jesus. John's Baptism was more than *just* the proselyte baptism practiced by Judaism, and the fact that the people coming for his baptism were all Jewish would indicate that it was seen by them as something different from proselyte baptism, which was only for Gentiles.

John's Baptism was a precursor to Christian Baptism, and as we have seen that it actually meant something, and in that regard superseded proselyte baptism, but it was not exactly the Baptism established by Jesus in the twenty-eighth chapter of Matthew. Several verses in Acts shed light on the relation of the baptism of John to Trinitarian Baptism.

In Acts 1:5, Luke quotes Jesus as saying that His listeners had heard Him say that, "John baptized with water, but before many days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit," which happened on Pentecost. In Acts 1:22 and 10:37, the Baptism of Jesus by John is seen by Luke as being the beginning of Jesus' earthly (public) ministry.

In Acts 11:15, just after Peter's revelation from heaven that all things created are clean, Peter is quoted as saying that "The Holy Spirit fell on" some men from Caesarea, and in v. 16 he recalls the words of Jesus, that "John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." To say that John "baptized with water" is redundant.

To baptize is to wash with water, but he says it like that to contrast John's Baptism with that of Jesus, which carries the Holy Spirit. And then we have the incident at the beginning of the nineteenth chapter of Acts, where Paul finds some "disciples" at Ephesus. Paul asks them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed.

They respond, "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." When Paul asks them about their Baptisms, they respond that they had been baptized, "Into John's Baptism," to which Paul replies that, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, of the Lord Jesus."

Paul then laid on hands, and “the Holy Spirit came on them,” and they spoke in tongues, a rare occurrence in the NT. Glossolalia happens only at Pentecost, at the conversion of many Jews, in Acts 10:44-46 at the conversion of Cornelius, the first recorded Gentile convert, and in Acts 19:6, where the first European (Ephesus) converts were made.

From these texts and from John’s words today we can clearly see that it is the Holy Spirit that elevates Christian, Trinitarian Baptism above John’s Baptism. This is not to say that the Holy Spirit is a NT invention or that nothing was going on in John’s Baptism. The Holy Spirit, it is true, has been there with the Father and the Son from eternity.

It is to say that the Holy Spirit is in NT times specifically given in the specific act of Christian, Trinitarian Baptism, a Baptism that was established by Jesus and that did not exist before His instituting of it. The practical result for the Christian is the certainty that in that act of Baptism he has been given the life-giving Spirit, and there is certainty.

There was a certain certainty in the OT equivalent of circumcision, but that was only for boys and the function was to be a visual reminder that your race was “cut off” from other races, chosen by Him to be His People. None of the things connected to NT Trinitarian Baptism is found in circumcision. In Baptism, something is actually going on.

In fact, there are a lot of things actually going on in Baptism, and a good starting point for finding them out is the back of the Catechism, where you will find Bible verse upon Bible verse about all the wonderful things going on in Baptism. In SE Kansas, my people were constantly having to make apologia for Infant Baptism. In Iowa East not so much.

Nine years ago, I talked about some of the amazing things God has done; things recorded in the Bible. I then talked about the amazing things God still does, things like absolving sin through the voice of a mere man, like His being really present with us in bread and wine, like all the wonderful things He does through the simple water of Holy Baptism.

The body language told me that those things really resonated with the hearers, things that are pure, unadulterated, one hundred percent Gospel. I think we don’t talk enough about those things, and I think it’s because most Americans don’t believe those things, but that should not stop us from doing it. We do, after all, firmly believe all those things.

I might talk about them again this week.

And I think I’ll talk about different baptisms.

Law/Gospel

No Savior/Savior – Without Jesus the Savior, we are not saved from hell and damnation. Jesus the Savior has come, and we are saved into heaven.

No Christ/Christ – Essentially the same concept as No Savior/Savior, but with an emphasis on the time rather than the action of saving us. OT people had waited a long time for this time, and now it's here. Christians have waited a long time for the Second Coming, and it is here, but not yet.

No Baptism/Baptism – Baptism actually does something positive and without it a person does not receive the benefits offered in that act. Keeping Romans 6 in mind, I have talked about how, in Baptism, we are taken on a journey through space and time back to the events of Holy Week, and forward to the time of our own death and resurrection.

Prepare the Road/The Road is Prepared – Knowing about God and sin, man tries very hard to prepare for the day of judgment that he knows is coming. Our efforts are largely unsuccessful and far from perfect. The good news is that the way has been prepared for us, but the work of Jesus, the benefits of which are communicated to us by Word and Sacrament. OT prophets, John the Baptizer, the Apostles, and now Pastors are the people who handle Word and Sacrament.

Sermon Titles

John the Baptizer

The Road Ahead

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

Preparing the Way

About Baptism

Hymns

On Jordan's Banks, the Baptist's Cry – LSB 344

Prepare the Royal Highway – LSB 343

Sing Advent hymns during the Advent Season.

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, Iowa

Resources

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MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

ODCC – F.L. Cross, Editor, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford University Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

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GBO – www.greekbible.com

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Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html