

Baptism of Our Lord, 2011

Text: Matthew 3:13-17

Title: The Proud Father

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Picture a little league game. A child nervously steps up to the plate with runners on base and the game on the line. The pitch comes in and he closes his eyes and swings as hard as he can. Somehow bat connects with ball and it goes soaring over the fence for a game winning homerun. Now picture the boys' parents. See them standing and cheering on their son as he rounds the bases. See their proud, beaming faces.

This scene is played out in many different venues all across the world- at sporting events, at band or choir concerts, at dance recitals, and at graduations. Parent proud of their kids. Applauding them, Cheering them on.

Think of a time when your parents were proud of you and pleased with your accomplishments.

Today, Jesus' heavenly Father declares that He is pleased with His beloved Son. He's a proud Father.

But consider for a moment what makes God the Father proud of Jesus Christ, His only Son. What does Jesus do to elicit this response?

It's not what you would expect.

You would expect God the Father to be proud when Jesus does one of His many miracles. You would expect God the Father to be proud of Jesus for healing someone, or feeding the hungry or raising someone from the dead. "This is my beloved Son, because He has done these marvelous deed."

But no. God the Father doesn't declare His pleasure when Jesus performs a miracle or a healing or an exorcism, but when Jesus is baptized. In fact, Jesus baptism takes place before Jesus' public ministry begins, before Jesus has begun teaching and preaching. To most people, Jesus hasn't accomplished anything yet, nothing that would warrant praise from heaven.

So why is God the Father pleased at Jesus' baptism? And why does Jesus need to be baptized in the first place?

Baptism is for sinners. John the Baptist was preaching a message of repentance. "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." "Your king is coming, so get ready, change your life." We remember this from Advent.

And when people came to John to be baptized, they confessed their sins. And then they were baptized. Baptism gave sinners a new, fresh start on life.

But Jesus was different. Jesus had no sins to confess. He was no sinner. He was the perfect Son of God. There's no need for Jesus to be baptized. There are no sins to be washed away.

And so John is right to be confused. John is right to object. "No, Lord, I need to be baptized by you. I'm the sinner. You've got it all backwards."

To which Jesus responds, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

This is the reason why Jesus is baptized. Jesus is baptized to fulfill all righteousness, that is, so that all of us might be made righteous.

Jesus doesn't have any of His own sins to repent of.

But Jesus bears your sin. He is the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world. All the sin of the world is laid on Him.

Jesus willingly joins the sinners there in the Jordan River.

This is why His Father is proud of Him. This is what pleases His Father- the fact that Jesus bears the sins of the world, and that through Him forgiveness is offered to all.

God condemns sinners because of His justice and because of His love for them. Not because it's something that He likes doing. It does not please God to punish sinners.

Similarly, parents don't punish their disobedient children because they are mean, but because they love their children and they want what's best for them.

Parents make rules for their children to keep them safe and to protect them from harm. They tell their children not to talk to strangers, cross the street without looking or stay out late, because they love them and don't want anything bad to happen to them.

Similarly, God gives us His law out of love for you. God knows that if you honor your parents, you don't hurt one another, you love only your spouse, don't steal, lie or covet, that things will go well for you and you'll have a good life.

When you disobey His law, you deserve to be punished. It's not something that God enjoys doing, but it needs to be done to satisfy His justice. God's law is meaningless without consequences, just as parents' rules are meaningless unless there are consequences to breaking them. Punishing sinners is not something that pleases God, but it needs to be done.

What pleases God, what makes God happy and proud is not punishing His children, but forgiving them.

God doesn't ignore sin, and just let people get away with breaking His law and hurting other people. God forgives sins, which He does only through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Through His baptism, and His bearing the sins of the world, Jesus makes forgiveness available to all people. He gives you His righteousness. And this is what pleases His Father and makes Him proud of His Son.

Jesus bore all of your sin all the way to the cross, and your sin died there with Him. "For the death he died he died to sin, once for all."

Jesus' baptism begins His journey to the cross and announces to the world that he is bearing the sins of the world. And this pleases His heavenly Father.

So how do you please God? How do you make your heavenly Father proud of you?

You can start by following His law. God has told you how to please Him- love God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Unfortunately, we all fall short. We fail to keep God's law, and we disappoint Him.

The only one who has kept God's law perfectly is Jesus Christ.

But thankfully, you have access to all that Jesus Christ has done for you in our baptism.

Remember the Epistle lesson. Through baptism you have been joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Your old, sinful self has died. That person that always disappoints God and fails to please Him is dead, done away with.

And you have been given a new life in Jesus Christ. Jesus' life is now your life. You are clothed with Christ and His righteousness. When God the Father looks at you, He sees Jesus Christ, His beloved Son, and all His righteousness.

There are people in your life who will not be pleased with you. There will be times when you feel like a disappointment to your parents, to your spouse, or to your children. You will feel like you've let down your friends, or your teachers or your boss.

But don't worry.

God the Father is always pleased with you. You are his beloved child. Not because of anything that you have done to earn His love, but because you are baptized. Even though you are a sinner, everything is forgiven. In God's eyes you are the same as Jesus and so His words to Jesus are for you, too. "You are my beloved son, you are my beloved daughter, and I am pleased with you."