

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 3: LEADER

Jesus, the Life of Jesse's Tree

Matthew 3:13–17; Romans 6:1–11

OPENING

Pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Advent 3; *LSB Altar Book*, p. 842)

INTRODUCTION

To Jordan came our Lord, the Christ,
To do God's pleasure willing,
And there was by Saint John baptized,
All righteousness fulfilling;
There did He consecrate a bath
To wash away transgression,
And quench the bitterness of death
By His own blood and passion;
He would a new life give us. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* 401)

In previous weeks, we have seen that Jesus is the Seed and Root of Jesse's tree. This week we learn that He is the Life of Jesse's tree as well. While self-righteous sinners assume that their conduct makes them pleasing to God, St. Paul is emphatic that we are saved only by Christ's life (Romans 5:10). With a peek ahead to next week's lesson, we see the evangelist St. John says of the Word made flesh that, from the beginning, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). As we focus on Christ's Baptism, we see an essential part of Christ's life on behalf of us sinners.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Transition: Matthew 3:13 is the first time Jesus' name is mentioned since the notice of His birth in Matthew 2:1.

Q1. Whenever we encounter the name *Jesus*, what should come to mind? See Matthew 1:21–23. According to John 1:43–49, why is it so surprising that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee?

A1. As Christians, we become so accustomed to using the name *Jesus* that we don't think twice about its significance, but it means "He [i.e., the Lord] saves," and Gabriel specifically tells Joseph that Jesus "will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). We also learn that He is *Immanuel*, "God with us" (1:23). So, when Jesus comes to the Jordan to be baptized, we know this is a significant part of His work as Savior and that later He will institute Holy Baptism as a means of giving us "forgiveness of sins" (Acts 2:38).

In Matthew 2:23, we are told that Jesus lived in Nazareth in fulfillment of a prophecy "that He would be called a Nazarene." This passage has puzzled many students of the Bible because the Old Testament does

not record this prophecy. However, the best explanation for that verse is found in the fact that Nazareth in Galilee was a byword for backwardness and insignificance. As Nathanael asked, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). The answer is, “Absolutely!” Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and King of Israel, confounding the expectations of sinful humans. This is the theology of the cross: that God chooses what is despised and rejected by men to atone for the sin of the world and accomplish salvation for us.

Transition: *Jesus* and *Joshua* are the same names in Greek (Ἰησοῦς).

Q2. With the mention of the Jordan River, what event would come to mind for those familiar with the Old Testament, and how does this relate to Jesus’ work? See Joshua 3:14–17. What are two other “saving” events in the Old Testament that occur at the Jordan, and what can we learn from them? See 2 Kings 2:11–14 and 5:9–10, 14.

A2. When Joshua led Israel into the Holy Land forty years after the Exodus and wilderness wanderings, it fulfilled the Lord’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—reiterated through Moses to the people—that they would dwell in Canaan. The ark of the Lord’s presence caused the waters to draw back just as the Lord had done at the Exodus. Now, the Son of God enters the same Jordan River to take one more step to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15) so that through Baptism and faith, His people may enter the promised land of heaven.

Similarly, Elijah’s ascent into heaven at the Jordan foreshadows Christ’s ascent into heaven to prepare a place for us (John 14:1–4). And the combination of God’s Word (spoken by Elisha) and the water (the cleansing of Naaman in the Jordan) foreshadows the wonderful cleansing effects of Baptism, washing us free of sin.

Transition: Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized by John, but John protested, saying, “I need to be baptized by You” (Matthew 3:14).

Q3. What element of John’s response to Jesus’ desire to be baptized was perfectly reasonable, given what John knew of Jesus? See Matthew 3:11 and John 1:15. What does Jesus mean by saying that His Baptism was necessary to “fulfill all righteousness”? See Isaiah 53:11 and 2 Corinthians 5:20–21.

A3. It is completely understandable that John the Baptizer would have been puzzled that Jesus wanted to be baptized. First, Jesus was sinless. Second, John had confessed he was not even worthy to carry Jesus’ sandals. In fact, even though John was six months older than Jesus, “He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me” (John 1:15). This is a reference to Jesus’ pre-existence as God the Son.

Jesus’ Baptism is the moment that He is publicly identified by the Father as His beloved Son, and that points us to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, whose death and resurrection will cause “many to be accounted righteous” (53:11). In His Baptism, Jesus identifies Himself with sinners and takes our place under God’s Law and judgment against sin. God made Christ, who never sinned, to *be sin* and die for it on the cross so that we can become righteous and saved by His free gift.

Transition: The Baptism of Jesus provides a clear image of the Holy Trinity and points forward to Jesus’ institution of Christian Baptism in which we are baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is the highest mystery in the Christian faith, and people often struggle to comprehend it.

Q4. Instead of trying to unravel the mystery of the Holy Trinity, what does Jesus want us to do? See John 14:6–11, 26–27.

A4. God is incomprehensible, but through Jesus Christ and His Word, we have access to and full communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While philosophy seeks to understand God, faith contents itself with knowing and trusting in Jesus Christ, who brings us to the Father. The Holy Spirit

works through the apostolic Word, which He inspired the apostles and evangelists to record by bringing to their remembrance the teachings of Jesus. The consequence of this is peace: not an earthly peace that has every problem figured out, but peace in our consciences knowing that we are saved from our sins and spared from the wrath of God.

Transition: Luther’s Small Catechism teaches that Baptism “works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare” (Baptism, Second Part).

Q5. Which words and promises recorded in Romans 6:3–11 assure us of forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ?

A5. To be baptized into Christ’s death means that His death for sin is our death for sin, and our future resurrection from the dead is just as sure as His own resurrection. We have died with Christ and, therefore, have been set free from the eternal consequences of our sin. This is why Romans 6:3–5 is appointed to be read at the beginning of a funeral service. Since Christ has been raised and never will die again, we can be confident that we will live with Him eternally after our bodies have been raised from the dead.

Transition: The Small Catechism also teaches that Baptism “indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (Baptism, Fourth Part).

Q6. What parts of Romans 6:1–11 emphasize the significance of Baptism as a daily drowning of the old Adam and arising of the new? What comfort do we have when we fail in the struggle against sin? See Romans 7:24–25.

A6. Lutherans are sometimes accused of emphasizing justification at the expense of sanctification. We need to make sure that this accusation is not accurate by emphasizing both the forgiving, saving aspects of Baptism as well as the moral, temporal results that should come from putting our Baptism to good use. We receive the Holy Spirit in Baptism, so along with pardon for our sins, we also receive power to live a new life. St. Paul is adamant that Baptism is not merely a “get-out-of-hell-free card” but must result in a change in our thoughts and behaviors. If we have died to sin, we cannot still live in it. To be dead to sin means that the power of sin should not be able to exert any force on us. To be alive to God means that we are constantly looking to Him for every good thing and are seeking at all times to please Him. While the greatest comfort of Holy Baptism comes from its saving promises, we should not neglect the significance of Baptism in giving a shape to our daily lives: living in contrition and repentance, fighting against sin, and striving to do good works.

However, as St. Paul describes in Romans 7, our struggle with sin is a lifelong, bitter task, and our continued failures to obey God’s Word expose our wretchedness. “Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (7:24–25).

CONCLUSION

Christ, the life of all the living,
 Christ, the death of death, our foe,
 Who, Thyself for me once giving
 To the darkest depths of woe:
 Through Thy sufferings, death, and merit
 I eternal life inherit.
 Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
 Dearest Jesus, unto Thee. (*LSB* 420:1)

The Baptism of Jesus is a crucial moment in Jesus' life that reveals to us wonderful things about our life as those baptized into Him. In Baptism, God adopts us as His own, looks at us as His beloved children, unites us with Christ's death and resurrection, credits His righteousness to us and forgives all our sins, and promises us everlasting life. This is why Dr. Luther, in the Small Catechism on Daily Prayer, suggests that we begin and end each day with the sign of the cross and the words, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." By doing this, we remember who we belong to, who and how we have been redeemed, and who will accompany us day and night. Thanks be to God for the gifts of Holy Baptism!

Close with prayer.

CLOSING

Pray: Father in heaven, at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River You proclaimed Him Your beloved Son and anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized in His name faithful in their calling as Your children and inheritors with Him of everlasting life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Baptism of Our Lord; *LSB Altar Book*, p. 567)

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 3: STUDENT

Jesus, the Life of Jesse's Tree

Matthew 3:13–17; Romans 6:1–11

OPENING

Pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Advent 3; *LSB Altar Book*, p. 842)

INTRODUCTION

To Jordan came our Lord, the Christ,
 To do God's pleasure willing,
 And there was by Saint John baptized,
 All righteousness fulfilling;
 There did He consecrate a bath
 To wash away transgression,
 And quench the bitterness of death
 By His own blood and passion;
 He would a new life give us. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* 401)

In previous weeks, we have seen that Jesus is the Seed and Root of Jesse's tree. This week we learn that He is the Life of Jesse's tree as well. While self-righteous sinners assume that their conduct makes them pleasing to God, St. Paul is emphatic that we are saved only by Christ's life (Romans 5:10). With a peek ahead to next week's lesson, we see the evangelist St. John says of the Word made flesh that, from the beginning, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). As we focus on Christ's Baptism, we see an essential part of Christ's life on behalf of us sinners.

QUESTIONS

1. Whenever we encounter the name *Jesus*, what should come to mind? See Matthew 1:21–23. According to John 1:43–49, why is it so surprising that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee?
2. With the mention of the Jordan River, what event would come to mind for those familiar with the Old Testament, and how does this relate to Jesus' work? See Joshua 3:14–17. What are two other "saving" events in the Old Testament that occur at the Jordan, and what can we learn from them? See 2 Kings 2:11–14 and 5:9–10, 14.
3. What element of John's response to Jesus' desire to be baptized was perfectly reasonable, given what John knew of Jesus? See Matthew 3:11 and John 1:15. What does Jesus mean by saying that His Baptism was necessary to "fulfill all righteousness"? See Isaiah 53:11 and 2 Corinthians 5:20–21.

4. Instead of trying to unravel the mystery of the Holy Trinity, what does Jesus want us to do? See John 14:6–11, 26–27.
5. Which words and promises recorded in Romans 6:3–11 assure us of forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ?
6. What parts of Romans 6:1–11 emphasize the significance of Baptism as a daily drowning of the old Adam and arising of the new? What comfort do we have when we fail in the struggle against sin? See Romans 7:24–25.

CONCLUSION

Christ, the life of all the living,
 Christ, the death of death, our foe,
 Who, Thyself for me once giving
 To the darkest depths of woe:
 Through Thy sufferings, death, and merit
 I eternal life inherit.
 Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
 Dearest Jesus, unto Thee. (*LSB* 420:1)

The Baptism of Jesus is a crucial moment in Jesus' life that reveals to us wonderful things about our life as those baptized into Him. In Baptism, God adopts us as His own, looks at us as His beloved children, unites us with Christ's death and resurrection, credits His righteousness to us and forgives all our sins, and promises us everlasting life. This is why Dr. Luther, in the Small Catechism on Daily Prayer, suggests that we begin and end each day with the sign of the cross and the words, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." By doing this, we remember who we belong to, who and how we have been redeemed, and who will accompany us day and night. Thanks be to God for the gifts of Holy Baptism!

CLOSING

Pray: Father in heaven, at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River You proclaimed Him Your beloved Son and anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized in His name faithful in their calling as Your children and inheritors with Him of everlasting life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Baptism of Our Lord; *LSB Altar Book*, p. 567)