

“With You I Am Pleased,” Luke 3:21-38 (Second Sunday After Epiphany, January 20, 2019)

<sup>21</sup> Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

<sup>23</sup> Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, <sup>24</sup> the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, <sup>25</sup> the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, <sup>26</sup> the son of Maath [ma-ATH], the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, <sup>27</sup> the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, <sup>28</sup> the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, <sup>29</sup> the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat [mat-THAT], the son of Levi, <sup>30</sup> the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, <sup>31</sup> the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha [mat-TA-tha], the son of Nathan, the son of David, <sup>32</sup> the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, <sup>33</sup> the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, <sup>34</sup> the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, <sup>35</sup> the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, <sup>36</sup> the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, <sup>37</sup> the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, <sup>38</sup> the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

## PRAY

This morning we continue our study in the gospel of Luke and today we come to the end of chapter three, where we read Luke’s account of Jesus’ baptism and Jesus’ genealogy.

Now, what do these two things have to do with one another? And what do genealogies have to do with anything?

A whole lot, as it turns out. Luke is trying to tell us something about who Jesus is and what he came to do, and while you can find this message all over the Bible, it’s not told more powerfully anywhere else in the Scriptures.

Through Jesus’ baptism and genealogy, Luke wants us to know three things: *first, the nature of Jesus. Second, the purpose of his baptism. Third, how we must respond.*

First, the nature of Jesus. “<sup>21</sup> Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” Luke 3:21-22.

It would have been a dramatic scene. John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin and the last, great prophet of Israel, has baptized hundreds in the Jordan River, and maybe they are all still standing around.

Then it's Jesus' turn. Jesus is immersed, then comes out of the water and begins to pray. Mark in his account writes then that "the heavens were ... torn open." There's a violent sundering that takes place in the air around Jesus and John the Baptist, and suddenly a window into the heavenly dimension appears. Maybe this opening is in the sky just a few feet from them.

The Holy Spirit in the form of a dove comes out of that opening and descends on Jesus, followed by a voice from the opening. The voice from heaven says Jesus is his Son and the voice is well pleased with him.

I've performed lots of baptisms over the years. Nothing like this has happened. Nothing like this has ever occurred at any baptism except this one.

What does it all mean? It means that here, at the very beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, God wants it clear that Jesus himself is God.

To be a Christian means not just that you believe in God, but that you believe in the *triune* God – that God has eternally existed in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person is God, but we don't have three gods in Christianity – three divine persons in the godhead, but one God. This is one of the rare passages in the Bible where all three persons are present like this at the same time and same precise place. The Father owns the voice that speaks through the portal to heaven, the Spirit takes the form of the dove.

And Jesus is the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, every bit as much God as the Father and the Spirit. Some scholars have argued that whenever the Bible calls Jesus "the Son" that it is not a title that reflects Jesus' divinity but instead reflects Jesus' humanity. After all, aren't all Christians called sons of God? Doesn't Paul say in Romans 8:14 that if you have the Spirit that you, too, are sons of God? That's what the Unitarians and Jehovah's Witnesses would argue. Jesus is specially anointed by God, perhaps, but he's no more God himself than you and I are.

No, that's not what's going on here. No one present at Jesus' baptism would have taken those words that way. The Father's affirmation from heaven, "You are my beloved Son," is a reference to one of the great messianic Psalms in the Hebrew Scriptures – Psalm 2. In it, God speaks of a future King who would also be his Son. And this king is unlike any other king, even unlike his great ancestor King David. About this king it is said, "<sup>7</sup>I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. <sup>8</sup>Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession." Psalm 2:7-8.

Who else could rule over the whole earth as his personal possession except God himself? The first thing we learn about the nature of Jesus is that he is fully God.

But here we also learn that Jesus is also fully man. That's the purpose of the genealogy. By the way, there is another genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1. Both genealogies claim to trace Jesus' ancestry back through Joseph, even though Joseph was not Jesus' actual father (Jesus was conceived through the Holy Spirit). Joseph, instead, was Mary's husband and raised Jesus as his own son. That's the point of verse 23: "Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli ..."

But many have pointed out over the years that Luke's genealogy is different from Matthew's, as they have different names between the time of King David and Jesus.

How do we reconcile the differences between these two genealogies? There are several different theories. One I think fits the culture and context best is that Heli is Mary's father, and that Mary was an only child. When Mary and Joseph were married, Heli adopted Joseph as his own son for the purpose of maintaining his family line. So Joseph would have had two genealogies. That was not have been a totally uncommon occurrence in ancient Israel.

However you understand the differences, Luke includes his genealogy in his gospel because he wants it absolutely clear that though Jesus is God, ***he took on flesh and is part of the human race just like everyone else.*** He was born of a woman, and through that woman his ancestry goes all the way back to Adam, the first man created by God himself, just like you and me.

Jesus was physically born into the world, he grew up from an infant, to a child, to a man. He grew tired, got thirsty and hungry. He became physically weak. He experienced powerful emotions. We often read in the gospels how he was deeply moved by something that happened. He wept, he grieved. He had a mind of his own and a will of his own.

But so what? Why does it matter that Jesus was fully God and fully man?

Second, the purpose of Jesus' baptism. John's practice of baptism was in some ways nothing new in Jewish life. The Judaism of the time was full of ablutions and affusions and immersions. The Jews washed before eating and before worship. Usually this involved only the hands, but by dipping their hands into water they acknowledged they were in some way unclean and it had to be removed before they could worship.

Likewise Gentiles who wanted to worship with the Jews went through what was called a proselyte baptism that involved pouring water not just on their hands but over their whole bodies.

But John's baptism went further than all that had gone before because now both Jew and Gentile were called to walk down into the Jordan River where John baptized and be completely immersed – in other words, be dipped until you are totally submerged in the water.

Further, in the previous baptisms, you performed them yourself. But John's baptism is the first we know of where someone else had to baptize you.

The symbolism seems clear. In his ministry John the Baptist was saying, "It doesn't matter your background. It doesn't matter whether you were Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, pastor or prostitute, you are all so messed up, so sinful, that you've got to go all the way under the water. It's not just that you just need a little cleaning. You've got to go all the way under the water to reflect how you must die. You must end the life you once lived. And someone else, from the outside, must baptize you, for you are powerless to do this for yourself."

That's John's baptism. But why did Jesus submit to it? The one thing everyone knows about Jesus was that he had no sin. He was not unclean. He had lived perfectly. Never a misstep, never an unkind word. He was the only one about whom the Father would say, "With you I am well pleased." He didn't need washing or immersion. Why did it do it?

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' [If any statement in the Bible ought to ring true to you, it's that one: "I think we're doing this baptism thing backwards"] <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented." Matthew 3:13-15.

The phrase "fulfill all righteousness" is key to understanding the purpose of Jesus' baptism. To be "righteous" means to be blameless, virtuous, completely justified. It means never needing to explain or make an excuse because you've done everything perfectly.

Jesus does not say, "I need to be baptized to fulfill *my* righteousness." As we've already seen, his righteousness is already full. He's perfect.

He says, "Let me be baptized, so that I can fulfill *all* righteousness." Now who is in Jesus' mind when he says "all"? You and me.

Jesus is perfect, but we are not. We've sinned over and over and over again. We owe God our lives because he is our Creator, but we've lived for ourselves instead of living for him by loving one another. We are not righteous.

But Jesus, by his baptism, officially steps into our place and says, "They are sinners. They've blown it time and again. They can't fulfill their righteousness, **but I can**. I can live the life they should have lived, and on the cross I can die the death they deserve to die." And by his baptism, Jesus is putting the whole world and all the powers in heaven and in hell on notice: I am taking their place. I am stepping into their shoes. I am fulfilling their righteousness.

Think about it like this: say you have to pass one final, comprehensive exam to get out of school and get your degree. But you have procrastinated all year long and when the time comes for you to take the test, you know if you walk in and take it you will fail.

But you have an identical twin sibling who is not in the class but knows the material cold and says to you, "Don't worry – I'll go in and take the test for you, the professor won't be able to tell the difference, no one will know it's not you, and everything will be fine. **They'll look at me, but they'll see you.**" If your sibling aces the test, you will be treated by the school as if you had fulfilled all righteousness. So now in the eyes of the school you are completely justified, you are blameless, you are perfect, you have completed all the requirements.

That's not a perfect analogy, of course, because in that scenario you've committed academic fraud against the school. You owe a responsibility to the school to master the material before you graduate with honors, and you haven't done that.

But the good news of Christianity is that the one to whom you owe the responsibility to live a righteous life – God himself – became a man in Jesus Christ and did it for you. Jesus can step into your shoes and live the perfect life you were supposed to live and it not be a fraud because Jesus is the one to whom you owe your life.

***You can believe Jesus did actually live a perfect life because he is fully God, and you can believe his life can really count for you because he is fully man.*** “Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” Hebrews 2:17.

The good news of Christianity says God looks **at you but sees Jesus standing in your place** and says, “Justified, blameless, righteous.” That’s the purpose of Jesus’ baptism.

Friends, Jesus’ baptism means that if he is your Savior, then no matter what you’ve done, no matter what you haven’t done, no matter what you’ll ever do in this life, God loves you. You are righteous, and there is nothing you can do to make God love you more nor is there ever anything you could ever do to make God love you any less.

And if you ask, “Why? Even if I could I wouldn’t do that for someone else. Why would God do that for me?” There can be only one reason: ***just because God loves you.*** He simply and gloriously decided to do this, to forgive all your sins and to make you perfectly righteous in his sight not because of anything you did or ever will do but ***just because he loves you.***

Third, what should our response to Jesus’ baptism be? Two things: *first, it should be our own baptism.* If you never been baptized before yet you say you believe in Jesus, you agree with this sermon and say, “Jesus fulfilled my righteousness by identifying with me in his baptism,” then why don’t you identify with him in your baptism? That’s how it’s done – that’s the sign Jesus gave us that we have entered into the family of God. If you believe Jesus was baptized for you, you should be baptized to identify with him.

Now, if you are here this morning and come from a Presbyterian or Methodist or Catholic background, then just bear with this Baptist preacher for a few moments. We rarely talk about the act of baptism itself and our denominational differences (this may be the first time it’s ever come up in a Sunday morning sermon) but when you preach on Jesus’ baptism you can’t avoid it.

This is a Baptist church, and so we only practice believer’s baptism – that means the candidate for baptism is old enough to give a credible profession of faith in Christ to an elder of the church, and when we baptize them we immerse them; we put them all the way under the water.

Therefore, we do not practice infant baptism (because an infant cannot profess faith), nor do we baptize by sprinkling or pouring water over the candidate’s head. Just as John the Baptist and Jesus got down in the Jordan River and John put Jesus all the way under the water, we fill a portable baptistry with water and put it on the stage, then the candidate and I get in and I put him all the way under the water.

If you were baptized as an infant or sprinkled at confirmation and you're convinced that's a Christian baptism, and you want join Grace Bible, then you are welcome to join. We're not going to require that you get dunked. ***We can agree to disagree on this issue.*** I love Presbyterians and I would almost certainly be a Presbyterian myself except for the fact that they are wrong on baptism. But guess what? My Presbyterian friends are certain I'm wrong on baptism. And when it comes to membership here it doesn't matter. You can be a member of Grace Bible and hold tightly to your Presbyterian or Methodist beliefs on this issue because while we have a uniform practice on baptism, we don't require uniform belief. Our baptism should be the first response to Jesus' baptism.

*Our second response should be to trust Jesus.* Whenever you face something difficult in your life, you're always looking for someone who has walked the path ahead of you.

If you are a mom of really young children, and you're trying to figure out to raise them without going crazy yourself, I'll tell you where you won't go to get help. You won't pack all your little kids in the minivan, drive on campus, get everyone out on Sorority Row and walk up to the Tri-Delt house. You won't knock on the front door, and ask the first girl that you see, "Will you please show me how to be a mom to all these wild little kids?" That girl would stare at you in fear, think you're crazy, and even if she doesn't she nevertheless would be no help.

Why? She hasn't walked that path yet. No, you go find some mom ten or twenty years further down the road of motherhood, and when she gives you advice it's like gold, because her children have survived into the teen years or even adulthood. She's walked the path ahead of you.

***Jesus' baptism means he has walked our path ahead of us.*** He has lived the life we should have lived. He knows where the landmines are. He knows how to navigate this life. And the Bible tells us he lived so well. He was the most attractive man who ever lived – not physically but in his personality. Children, tax collectors, and prostitutes – the weak and the outcasts of society – were all drawn to him, while the self-righteous hated him and the powerful, like Pilate, were ultimately frightened by him. That's a compelling personality, that's the kind of personality we all wish we had.

He's walked the path ahead of us, *so we should trust him.* And we do that by obeying his law. Not because we have to keep the law for God to love us (that's already been eternally secured by Jesus' life and death on the cross), but because God designed us to live a certain way and we trust that design by obeying his law.

Christians do not look at all the commands in the Bible and say, "Oh, no, I've got to do them." Nor do we look at them and say, "My life will be miserable if I try to keep these rules." Instead, over time we look at them more and more as the path to living a truly human, truly free, truly joyful life.

We respond to Jesus' baptism by coming to believe what Psalm 19:7 says about the law of God: "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul [not crushing it, not burdening the soul – reviving it] ..." Psalm 119:27 says, "Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold."

For years I read these verses like these and believed they were, at best, hyperbole. In my more cynical moments, I thought the psalmist was making it all up. No one could seriously feel this way about the law of God. Reviving the soul? Better than fine gold? Give me a break.

But now, I know, the psalmist was completely sincere and absolutely right. Jesus loved the law of God and meditated on it day and night and perfectly obeyed it and, in turn, because he was fully human, it produced in him the most compelling person who ever lived. Therefore, the only sane response to his baptism is to trust him by learning to love and keep the law just as he did. As the old hymn puts it: “Our pleasure and our duty, though opposite before [back before we met Jesus, back when we thought the law of God would keep us from happiness]; since we have seen his beauty, are joined to part no more.” We see the goodness of God’s will for our lives in the law, so we want to keep it.

We were made to hear our Creator speak into our souls, “You are my son; with you I am well pleased.” Go to Jesus, look at him living and dying and being baptized for you, and experience the pleasure of knowing your God is pleased with you. AMEN.