

In God's Solidarity We Partake of the Great Exchange!

Mat. 3:13-17

Dear Friends in Christ, grace and peace from whom who came to dwell amongst us, Jesus Christ.

Christmas is over, Epiphany was a couple of days ago, the day when the infant Jesus was revealed to the Gentiles, to the world. The decorations are put away, and with all that, we risk putting the purpose of Christmas in storage as well. Jesus has come, but for what?

Our text of meditation this morning is the Gospel reading of Mathew 3, it talks about the Baptism of Jesus. This is happening some 30 years since the first Christmas. But that is not so much important, what's important is the connections we see, Jesus is born, God coming in the flesh to save his people, and not only his people, the Jews, but gentiles alike. And the to confirm the veracity of God's presence with his people, Jesus is baptized, and he is baptized by John, his cousin.

John had been baptizing, noting much more special to that, except that in our text this morning we see a very a unique event taking place, a baptism unlike any other, for this baptism lays the groundwork for our own baptism, on the one hand, and the other, shows God's solidarity with us!

What is Solidarity? The dictionary says: "It is mutual agreement and support" It is a harmony of interests and responsibilities among individuals in a group, especially as manifested in unanimous support and collective action for something. God indeed wants to be with his people, wants to support them, wants to act on their behalf and with them, through them.

And the work of Jesus that started right at His baptism is God's great solidarity with you! But it doesn't end there, because, as it happens, we

can have solidarity with people, we can stand with them, in their struggles, or needs, but we can never replace them where they are at. But Jesus can, and goes farther, in fact his baptism is not just his baptism and his solidarity with us, but in here he exchanges our place for his.

As you see the Baptism of Jesus is a manifestation of Christ's identity as the true Son of God, Redeemer of the world. And one of his functions is to fulfill all righteousness in order to redeem his creation by taking on himself the sin of the world.

The significance of Jesus' Baptism for us is his identifying with us, putting himself in our place, so that in our Baptism we are put in his. That's the point Paul applies in the Epistle when he says: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." (Rom 6:3–5).

With the course He's set at his baptism, given where he's decided to stand, and given all that's at stake, we ask, how is his solidarity and his exchange seen in your life? I think that that is an important question, for we have a vested interest in the answer, our answer affects our eternity.

At Jesus' birth, angels proclaimed God's gift. "Peace on earth, good will toward men." These are great words, even venerable words! Yet these words can too easily lose its meaning into general sentimentality, as we pack and store all the Christmas decorations and what not.

But notice where the focus of God's solidarity is, according to our text. On whom does God's favor rest? On people in general? Of course,

“Peace on earth! the angels announce. Then Epiphany God makes that clear. But for that solidarity to take place, an exchange needs to happen. So, in today’s Gospel we see something special happening, God is well pleased not in people in general, but in one person, the voice John and all around hear confirms the who: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” God the father is pleased in Jesus! And good for us that God is pleased because of what Jesus has done here and will do all through out his ministry.

Back in those days, the Bible says that all sorts of people came to John for his baptism of repentance. Critics came as well. Pharisees and Sadducees questioned the need for what John did after all they had and were proud of their cultural heritage, they were descendants of Abraham, which meant God they were special to God, or so they thought.

Then comes Jesus to the Jordan, to John, and look where he stands. He stands not with the proud, the brood of vipers, as John calls them, but he stands together with the sinners, the sinner that had come to John. He stands today with us sinners too.

Now, how did John realized who Jesus was we don't know from Matthew's text, but what follows proves John right. As you see Jesus wanted to be baptised, the same baptism that sinners where taking. But John would have none of this at first, so he questioned Jesus. But whatever was ordained by God needs to be done in God’s terms. So, Jesus’ baptism happens on Jesus' terms, on God's terms. “Let it be so now” Jesus says. As if saying: "Yes, but that is not the point; something else must happen now." What should happen? That all righteousness must be fulfilled! That he would take our place, that an exchange be made.

John had a point: in and of himself Jesus had no need of this. But Jesus makes a point: I will be baptized. Why? "Because" Jesus would say, "I have come for sinners, I stand with sinners, and I am to be the chief of sinners, shouldering the burden of all.

Righteousness can be tied to a manner of living, a way of being. But here it is tied to what God has ordered or framed forth for us. For Jesus that means becoming the embodiment of humanity and then, even while observing God's will, heading toward the end where that sin-plagued humanity leads. What's happening here, at the Jordan river, is the start of that path that will end three years from now, on the cross. So, yes John, it should "let it be" even as Jesus chooses to side with sinners, to stand with them, and it starts now, as he stands with them in the Jordan waters.

"Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." It is fitting for the sinless Son of God to be baptized to become sin for us by participating in this saving act. In this act, Jesus is standing with sinners.

What comes next is an "Amen" to what Jesus has said and done, from none other than the Father. Some, Pharisees and Sadducees, would say he's crazy, how and why would he mix with this crowd. In fact, they made sure Jesus knew their thoughts all through his ministry. Yet, their disapproval or approval is of no concern for Jesus. Right here, on the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, he shows the world that God's ways must be done. So, Jesus is baptized, comes out of the water, and immediately heaven stands in solidarity with a great voice: "This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased." "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Not just anyone, but "my Son." And not just pleased, but "well pleased."

God stands in solidarity with Jesus, with this Christ, the Anointed, the Messiah. We can understand it, if those on the riverbank were stunned, confused which probably were. After all, there were messianic expectations of all sorts, many quite extraordinary. Except that Jesus here likely looked most ordinary, even after all that happened. But beware wanting him on our terms. Rather take what is given, trust, what is said, and cling to what is given, for it is God who gives it to us, and God never is wrong.

To all of those standing there that day and to those who trust Jesus' exchange, there is the free gift of the Spirit, an anointing, which leaps out and shouts approval. And the voice from heaven, calls you the baptized "Son," "daughter" I stand with you! You have been exchanged! As I'm pleased in Jesus, so I'm pleased with you!

Can it get any better than that? Think again God is pleased with you. Is there any doubt this morning that God is pleased with you? Maybe you feel like being a prodigal son, unlovable, well think of this. Jesus stands with the sinner, stands with the prodigal sons and daughters, stands with the unlovable, and not only stands in solidarity but has even exchanged his life for yours. And in him, from heaven itself, the voice proclaims: "well pleased."

This is the true solidarity! God's solidarity with all. Jesus' solidarity with sinners is certainly noble. But God's solidarity with Jesus puts things in a new Epiphany light, a light that prompts us to take heart, it is the light of life that he gives us as he exchanged his for ours.

But we're not done. It's not "take heart" in some vague wishful thinking. We have hard evidence: Jesus in solidarity with sinners, God with Jesus, and God with us. How so? Where? In *our* Baptism. To be

sure, John's baptism that Jesus sought is not identical with our own. The path was not finished for Jesus. There are still cross and empty tomb to come. But we, we are baptized into that death and resurrection of Jesus. Martin Luther calls it the Happy Exchange.” He says: “That is the mystery which is rich in divine grace to sinners: wherein by a wonderful exchange our sins are no longer ours but Christ’s and the righteousness of Christ not Christ’s but ours. He has emptied himself of his righteousness that he might clothe us with it and fill us with it. And he has taken our evils upon himself that he might deliver us from them. . . . In the same manner as he grieved and suffered in our sins, and was confounded, in the same manner we rejoice and glory in his righteousness” (Martin Luther, Werke [Weimar, 1883], 5:608).

Remember this, that what is Christ's has becomes ours, even as our sin became his—this, this indeed, is "happy exchange" and is made ours in Baptism.

The "who for us and for our salvation" confessed in the creed is bound to us even as Christ's name is put on us, in our baptism. There, faith is planted, and we become sons and daughters in the kingdom of God.

As far as we know, at Baptisms today there are no reports of church roofs opening up, with doves descending and voices from the sky, but there is no need for that. Something spectacular still happens as the Father, as Christ, stand in solidarity and give the Spirit. We have the record in the Gospel and the promises of God—promises rooted in Christ, who still stands in solidarity with all righteousness for us and for our salvation. All righteousness is fulfilled for us all. In this God is well-pleased.

Jesus gave his life for us, and it's in his Baptism that we first see this wonderful exchange. Christ, God's beloved Son, takes our place so that in our Baptism we are beloved children of God. So Baptism is where the exchange begins for us too. That's why the day of our Baptism can well be called our rebirthdays. Do you know your baptismal birthday, the date you were baptized? Find out, and celebrate it with your family! Each year . . . and every time we (make the sign of the cross) speak those words spoken at your Baptism: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.