

“THIS MAN IS CHRIST OUR SUBSTITUTE!”

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 | The Baptism of Our Lord | January 10/13, 2018

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.

Jesus

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Your birth certificate. Your state issued driver's license or I.D. Your passport. All of these are legal documents that help identify you. They confirm your unique identity. They tell others who you are.

And you need them. If you want to drive a car or open a checking account, you need a form of I.D. If you want to take out a mortgage or check into a hotel room or buy a six pack, you have to be able to identify yourself. In these days of meth labs and illicit drug abuse, you even need a form of identification just to purchase a package of Sudafed. Yes, you need to be able to legally identify who you are. It would be hard to get through life without some form of I.D.

Even more important than the ability to identify yourself is the ability to identify your Savior. Make no mistake, there are a lot of counterfeits out there. Many try to steal our Savior's identity and take his place. The devil, of course, is behind it all. There is no lie he won't tell to convince us to trust in someone or something other than Christ.

The portion of God's Word before us today cuts through his lies and clearly identifies our Savior. In fact, the Spirit presents to us at least three forms of identification for our Savior. First, there is

the testimony of John, the forerunner. Then there is the Spirit's anointing. And, finally, the Father's approving voice. All three of them say the same thing about our Lord: "THIS MAN IS CHRIST, YOUR SUBSTITUTE!"

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Before we can talk about Jesus' identity, we need to talk about our own. Usually, when you show your I.D., you are confirming your identity as a unique individual. I mean, as far as I know (and you all hope), there are no other almost-forty-eight-year-old, very white males living at 609 Waldo Blvd. in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, USA. In that sense, I guess you could say, I'm unique. But in another sense I am not. In this day and age when so many are attempting to identify as something they are not, I identify as a sinner. I have to. I have no choice in the matter. Sinfulness is my reality. And it's yours too.

The devil will do all he can to get you to minimize this fact. After all, you're not that bad of a sinner, right? I mean look at what some people do: rapists, murderers, drug addicts, pedophiles, prostitutes, human traffickers. Compared to them, you're a saint. And, of course, think of all the good things that you do: you work hard and love your family. You control

your temper and try not to drink too much. You don't speed or cheat on your taxes. You go to church, give to charity and help that elderly couple down the street with their yard work.

Sounds good. But none of it won't hold up in court. Not God's court anyway. You might think you're in better shape than that human trafficker. You're not. Neither am I. You see God doesn't ask for pretty good. He demands perfection. God doesn't tell us to compare ourselves to the worst criminals we can find. He tells us to measure ourselves against his standards. We simply don't measure up. Not even close. In thoughts and desires, words and deeds we daily fall on our face, far short of the glory of God. By nature we are chaff, destined for burning in unquenchable fire.

I'm so glad I don't have to stop there. I'm happy to report, dear fellow sinners, that we have a Savior, a Substitute who took our place and took away our sins.

I. The Testimony of John

John identifies him for us: **The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."**

John had a golden opportunity to engage in some identity theft. The people looked at this eccentric man, this powerful preacher and thought: He's the One! John

answered: "Nope. I'm not the One. The One you're waiting for is far greater. I'm not fit to carry his sandals."

John continued: **"He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire"** – a reference to the miracles of the great day of Pentecost. **"His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."**

Threshing is the process of separating grain in preparation for use. In John's day usually the grain was crushed by using an animal to drag a heavy threshing sledge over it. The farmer would then toss the material in the air. The light straw and chaff would blow away and could be collected for burning. The heavier kernels of wheat fell straight to the ground where they could be gathered and milled into flour.

Jesus is the Divine Thresher. Your relationship with him determines where you spend eternity. Those who reject him as Savior are like the chaff that is blown away and burned. Those who by God's grace alone receive him as Lord and Savior are like the wheat that is preserved and put to good use. They are gathered into the eternal "barn" of heaven.

John's point is clear: "Don't be the chaff. If you put your trust in me, that's what will happen. You will blow away and burn. Trust in Christ. He is your Savior. He is **'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'** (John 1:29). *This* man is Christ your Substitute!"

II. The Spirit's Anointing

OK. We've heard from John. Let's take a look at another form of I.D.: the Spirit's anointing. **When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove.**

The first sentence is surprising, to say the least. We know that Baptism is all about the forgiveness of sins. And so, naturally, sinners came out to the Jordan to be baptized by John, and have their sins washed away. And Jesus joined them! Wait. What? Why would Jesus, the sinless Son of God, the **"lamb without blemish or defect"** (1 Peter 1:18), submit to a sinner's baptism.

Paul has the answer: **"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us"** (2 Corinthians 5:21). Have you ever heard the old phrase "Don't throw out the baby with the bathwater?" That phrase originated from a custom that to our 21st century sensibilities seems really gross. In the Middle Ages baths were uncommon. When people did decide to scrub up a bit – about once a year or so – the whole family got involved. The men went first, of course. Then the women. The baby was bathed last. By the way, they never changed the bathwater. So by the time little Johnny got his turn in the tub, the bathwater was beyond gross. It wouldn't be hard to lose him in that foul water.

Jesus got into our foul bathwater. He willingly climbed into a tub filled with the filth of our sins, the filth washed off of us

in our own baptisms. At his baptism, the sinless Jesus identified himself as the Substitute of sinners. As Isaiah wrote: He **"was numbered with the transgressors"** (Isaiah 53:12).

Confirming his identity is none other than God's eternal Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. You know how you can tell whether or not an event is a big deal, by who shows up. For example, if POTUS himself shows up at a state funeral, rather than just sending the Vice President in his place, you know that the deceased was an important figure.

The Spirit's presence at Jesus' Baptism says a lot about the importance of this event. The Spirit himself took on bodily form. Those present saw what they thought was a dove landing on Jesus. It was no dove, but the Spirit himself, there to confirm our Savior's identity.

The Spirit did even more. He anointed Jesus. In today's first reading we heard about the anointing of David. Olive oil mixed with fragrant perfumes was poured over his head to make clear: This is the King. The Spirit's anointing did even more. In Acts we read that **"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power"** (10:38). The Spirit was there to empower God's Son to carry out his work as the sinner's Substitute.

III. The Father's Voice

God wants us to be absolutely certain that Jesus is the one. And so he offers one more form of identification so that there can be no doubt. The Father himself

spoke. **A voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”**

Reviews have become an important part of our world. You choose which electric kettle to purchase on Amazon based on the reviews. You choose the hotel based on what people say on Trip Advisor. Yelp reviews help you to pick a good place for Italian food.

God reviewed his Son. He gushed over his Son. Five stars. Two enthusiastic thumbs up. A big smiling emoji. “Well pleased!” Even though Jesus was just beginning his public ministry, God saw it all as complete. He saw his Son’s life of perfect obedience and said, “Well pleased!” He saw his Son’s sacrificial death, the priceless blood shed on the cross to atone for the sins of the world and gave his approval: “Well pleased!” He saw his Son’s victorious resurrection, a resurrection that guarantees our status as God’s forgiven children and secures our glorious eternal future, and said: “I love you, Son. I am well pleased!”

My friends, this enthusiastic, five-star review of his Son, allows God to look at us and give the thumbs up. Remember what our Lord’s baptism tells us. He is our Substitute. What he did counts for us. God considers his perfect life as our perfect life, his payment for sin as our payment for sin, the resurrection of his Son as the first in a long line of resurrected sons and daughters. God looks at you and me, his children adopted in Baptism, his family members through the gift of faith, and

says with a smile on his divine face: “You are my son. You are my daughter. I love you. With you, even you, I am well pleased!”

My friends, there can be no doubt about it. We’ve seen his I.D. We’ve viewed his credentials. His identity is confirmed. This man is Christ, our Substitute. That man standing in the water of the Jordan is our Savior. In him we have pardon and peace now and forever. Thanks be to God! Amen.

S.D.G.