

The Baptism of Our Lord
9 & 10 January, Anno Domini 2021
St. Matthew 3:13-17
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit.

I'm quite sure that the events of this past week in DC and the weeks since the election have led to a lot of discussions and questions about where we go from here as a nation. We are terribly polarized on nearly every issue that is discussed. Everyone gets lumped into some category or group so that we can easily tell the "good guys" and the "bad guys". Labeling a person makes it easier to justify hating him rather than engaging him. This one is antifa, this one is MAGA, this one is Proud Boys, that one is socialist. We have become so one-dimensional and so separated from each other that the person who disagrees is no longer a person but a plague that needs to be eradicated.

I have no doubt that there is an intense level of anxiety running through a lot of people. What just happened? What is this country going to look like moving forward? And I think that regardless of how the election had turned out, both sides are convinced that if the either guy had won, it would have been the end. In either case our idolatry has been on full display for God and his angels to see. Our trust in men and political ideologies and nations is undeniable. We must all hang our head in repentance and accept responsibility for the lovelessness, the anger, the chaos, and the disrespect that are running rampant throughout the world. No one is above reproach. No one is free from guilt. Sackcloth and ashes would be a good place to start. We all deserve the unfettered wrath of God. Indeed, what we are in the midst of is what happens when we are given over to our idolatry and our free wills. We are living in the world and culture we have created by despising the Word of God and our vocations. If we were half as concerned about God's will as we are about who holds political power and spent half the time pouring over Holy Scripture as we do watching the news and pouring over political websites, we would be a whole lot less anxious and much better able to see the things going on around us for what they are - the vicious but vain attacks of the devil on God's kingdom.

You are baptized. You are a redeemed child of God the Father Almighty and an inheritor of everlasting life. You are not a Democrat or a Republican or an American. Your ruler is not Trump or Biden or any ruler of flesh and blood. This country is no more important or special to God than any other, unless you think,

contrary to the words of Jesus that His kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. You have no king but the Lord Jesus Christ who has completely and forever overthrown the kingdom of Satan. The kingdom and the power and the glory are in His hand alone. Rulers and kingdoms of the earth rise and fall. Tomorrow they will all be forgotten as the grass. They did not create you. They do not sustain you from day to day. They cannot take away your sin or its death. They, like you, are like the flowers of the field which are here today and tomorrow are blown away. Christ and His kingdom alone remain. His Word which creates and forgives and raises from the dead endures forever.

In the Jordan River, God brought all the might of man to nothing by anointing His David, His Son Jesus Christ, with the oil of the Holy Spirit and declared before the world “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased. He is the highest of all the kings of the earth. Those who seek to take His throne, those who seek to throw off His rule will be crushed when He returns in glory. And His kingdom will not be like the kingdoms of the earth. His is a kingdom of mercy and grace. His is a kingdom that grows and spreads through the two-edged sword of the Word of His mouth which lays low the mighty and raises those who are bowed down. In His kingdom, the ruler is the servant of the ruled. In His kingdom, enemies are made beloved children, the dead are raised to life, not by force but by the washing of Holy Baptism.”

Beloved, your King does not seek to dominate you or take anything from you other than your sin and your death. He takes what is harmful as His own and gives you life and salvation and every good thing. He gives you both the food that perishes and heavenly food that gives life to both your body and your soul. He gives peace to those who fear God’s wrath and bestows His righteousness on repentant sinners. He defends the widowed, the orphaned, the weak, the preborn, and the elderly lying in their death bed. He is not impressed or intimidated by the vain shows of power by the strong of the earth. They are fools whose god is their belly and whose folly is their destruction. They shake their fists at God and threaten His Church but they are only sowing the seeds of their own destruction. Christ’s Church and His kingdom can’t be overthrown by even the gates of hell, let alone the mad rantings and powerless threats of men of flesh. You have nothing to fear from them. They tried to destroy Christ but He is seated at the right hand of God ruling over all things in heaven and on earth. He sits on His throne and laughs. He will return with glory and they will receive the just reward for their sin. Their attack is aimed at your Savior and you are blessed to share in His sufferings. You have been counted worthy of such glory.

And though those who hate Christ and His kingdom and His children will finally fail in their efforts along with their Satanic overlord, that does not mean that they will not seek to cause as much damage as possible and draw you and your little ones away from Christ. They will use every insidious and terrifying means they can imagine to cause you to fear them and abandon the faith. They will doggedly pursue you and threaten your livelihoods, your well-being, your family, your reputation, and your person. This has been the case from the day that Cain rose up and murdered Abel for Abel's faith. We dare not imagine that the same threats don't lie against us. We must prepare ourselves as the boldness of those who hate the Word of God grows and as that hatred is fanned and encouraged and rewarded. It should not be a surprise and we have no excuse for it to catch us unaware. Christ warned us. As surely as the world hated Him, it hates us and will seek to do the same to us that it did to Him.

Christians throughout the world have suffered across the ages. Abel, Noah, David, Elijah, the noble army of martyrs. We are not special and we are not exempt. Our time will come. Our time may have come. That remains to be seen. But it will come and if we are not prepared, if we have grown complacent by not hearing the preaching of God's Word and receiving Christ's Body and Blood, by not hearing the Word of God in our homes and being daily in prayer for ourselves and for the Church and for the world, then there is a very high likelihood that we will be swept away into unbelief in the midst of persecution. We will be blown about like ships on the sea, carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. We must all become masters of the Christian doctrine so that we are not deceived and led astray and so that we can defend one another. We must stand side-by-side with our brothers and sisters in Christ, locked arm-in-arm against the onslaught of persecution that is beginning to wash ashore. We must not be content with milk. We must nurture and strengthen faith by studying the Scriptures and the Confessions and discussing them with one another so that we may sharpen our swords for battle.

You cannot wage the whole war on your own. A good soldier cannot concern himself with every theater of the war or he will be overwhelmed and fail in his duty where he is placed. Each one has to remain focused on the task given to him. Stay focused on what the Lord has given to you to do and where He has placed you. Check your anxiety and depression over the condition of the world by returning to your vocation. Be faithful where the Lord has placed you on the battlefield. Take up the Small Catechism's Table of Duties and see what orders the Lord has given to you.

Are you a husband? Love your wife as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. Cherish her as a fellow heir of eternal life. Protect her, provide for her, pray for her. Treat them with the highest respect and never harshly. Feed her with the Word of God. Are you a wife? Submit to your husbands as the Church submits to the Lord. Receive your husband's love and care. Pray for him. Cherish him. Encourage him to be faithful on the front lines.

Are you a parent? Teach them the Word and will of God from sunup to sundown. Teach them to pray. Do not exasperate them with your anger or treat them as if they are inconvenient or standing in the way of what you really want. Fathers, do not stand aloof from your children trying to play the tough guy. Draw near to them as your heavenly Father draws near to you. Pray with them. Stand beside them in Church and show them that real men are men of humble faith, men who speak and sing the praises of God, men who confess their sins and call upon God for help. Parents, you are training your children to be adults, to be the next rank of soldiers on the battlefield. Take this job seriously. The enemies that seek after the souls of our children are real and they are definitely not waiting until they are grown ups to attack. We have to be honest about what is filling our children's ears through the TV and the internet. Don't give subtle poison a pass because it's cute or fun. Don't do the devil's job for him. Build a fortress around the hearts and minds of you children. They can't see the dangers. That's your job. Don't abandon them. Don't abandon your post.

Don't water down the faith trying to make it fun. That's not your job and the only thing it accomplishes is making luke-warm Christians who will tack tail and run when persecution arises. Wishy-washy, mealy-mouth Christianity will not stand in the fight. It will wither away and fall on the battlefield. Only the plain, clear truth of God's Word can protect us and overcome our attackers. Don't deprive your children of it. Like yours, their Baptism not only washed away their sins and made them children of God. It also conscripted them into battle with the devil, the world, and their own flesh. They are on the winning side now, but the fighting is not over and they can be drawn back away from Christ. Nothing you can do for your children, no experience, no lifestyle is more important than burying the seed of the Word of God deep within their hearts and minds. Nothing else will bring them peace in the midst of the darkness. Nothing else will give them comfort in the face of death. No other weapon will stand against Satan's attacks. Don't rob them of those weapons. You will answer to the Lord, their heavenly Father, if you do. But rejoice because the Lord Almighty is on your side and He will help you as you raise His little ones.

Are you a citizen? Pray for those in authority. Pay your taxes and give honor to those to whom they due. You may disagree with them and they may even be evil. In that case you are obligated out of love for you neighbor to boldly speak the truth in love, to speak with your neighbor, and work through every legal channel available to uphold what is right and just and good. But honor and respect those in authority as those that have been established by God. The only gates that you should be storming are those of hell as you pray against evil and speak God's Word and support its preaching. Evil rulers don't change your duty. In fact, they highlight the need for you to do your duty for your own sake and your neighbors'. You have the example of your Lord who submitted to the tyrants of His day and suffered their wrath precisely because He would not shy away from the truth. He could have called down legions of angels and destroyed them but He did not. Entrust yourself to God and know that as you faithfully go about your duty, the Lord sees the wickedness and will not endure it forever. The Lord will hold the wicked accountable in due season. Pray that they would repent and be united with us in the truth before it is too late and they are lost eternally. Do not try to pacify the world. You can't. It will only accept complete submission to its will. Do not try to overcome evil with evil. Instead, overcome evil with good. Be a bright light of truth in the darkness. Act in love toward your neighbors, especially your enemies, that they may see your good works and glorify God on the day of judgment.

Are you a child? Obey your parents. Receive their instruction. Honor them. Serve and obey them. You have the promise of the Lord that those who do will be blessed, it will go well with you, and you will enjoy the blessings of a long life. You are not unimportant because of your youth. Join in prayer and study. Pray that God would bless and strengthen your parents. Learn the Word of God diligently. You too are precious in the sight of God.

Above all, be a faithful and humble hearer of the Word of God. Receive His instruction. Repent. Be absolved. Remember daily that you are Baptized. You have been rescued from death and darkness and brought into the light and life of Christ. Pray for everyone. Be nourished and sustained by the Body and Blood which Christ gives His children to eat and to drink. Give your tithes joyfully to God in faith that His Word may not be silenced among us. Read the Scriptures. Attend Bible Class. Commit to learning the catechism by heart so that it may be a perpetual fountain of life and strength and truth flowing forth from your heart. By doing so you will be armed against every attack. You will recognize truth and falsehood. You will be equipped and strengthened to remain faithful in the hour of persecution and temptation. Know your church family that you may support and

encourage them in their need and they in yours. God has graciously given us to one another. This is our battalion. We are fellow soldiers so let us band together. Let us help keep one another in the truth and make sure that none suffers lack. Some of our brothers and sisters have begun to absent themselves from us. We all need to reach out to them and draw them back so that they are not lost. None can survive this battle on their own. Soldiers that wander out alone are captured and lost to the enemy.

You are the Baptized. That is who you are. You are an heir of the kingdom of God. God has given you His Holy Spirit. He has declared you to be His children and opened to you the gates of eternal life. But our Lord, Jesus Christ, before He rose in glory had to suffer the temptations of the devil, the persecution and hatred of the world, and the cross. And if you would follow Him then you too must deny yourself and take up the cross appointed for you. It will hurt. It will feel like and look like failure and loss. But you have the promise of the Lord that it is the way to victory and eternal life. In your Baptism you have been armed with the forgiveness of all your sins and the promises of God. You have been buried with Christ who now lives holding all authority in heaven and on earth and who sends His holy angelic legions to fight alongside of you. You have nothing to fear. Not the accusations of Satan. Not the wild rantings and ravings and threatenings of men. Not microscopic viruses that can make you sick and bring about the end of your earthly life. They can do no harm to the Baptized. Even if they take your earthly life, you have lost nothing. You will still be with Christ and on the Last Day your body will be raised and restored and glorified for eternal life. You can say with Paul "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." You belong to God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. No one can rob you out of His gracious hand. No one can take away the victory of the cross and the empty tomb. Our Lord and captain who first set His feet in the waters of the Jordan has opened to you the Promised Land. He has prepared the way and will bring His children safely through. Do not be afraid.

In the Name of +Jesus.