

The Baptism of Our Lord • January 11, 2015

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

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Mark 1:4-11 (Romans 6:-11)

“Being SJLC 2015: Jesus Is On a Mission”

Christmas vacation sounds like a fantastic idea. For a period of a week or two, you're freed from the obligations of school or work. You have time to spend with your friends and family, maybe doing things that you'd been anticipating for months. But along with all the events and activities that take place each year, you might have happened upon a block of hours – or even days – when you didn't have anything to do. No obligations. No expectations. There's no schedule to follow: it's completely open.

An open schedule. No expectations. No obligations. It's glorious feeling! You're free to do pretty much whatever you'd enjoy doing. You could catch up on the shows you've been saving to your DVR or stockpiling in your Netflix queue. You could spend time relaxing and reading on the couch, or you could go to the gym if that's more your speed. Or you could hang out and just *be*. But Christmas vacation doesn't last.

By this point in January, most folks have returned to their schools and their jobs (snow days and bad traffic aside) and started getting back into the swing of things. Schedules aren't so open anymore. In regular life, there's homework to complete, deadlines to beat, chores to do, and responsibilities to be met. It's not too bad... most of the time, at least.

Every now and then come days when more is required of you. You find yourself in crunch time trying to complete a project. You learn that a family member is ill and needs your support. Your kids have all their extracurricular activities meeting at the same time – in different parts of town. But those days can start to add up to weeks, and the weeks become months. You begin to realize that there's no way you can get it all done. Even as you try your hardest, you've got too much to do; your schedule's too crowded, and your abilities, too limited. You can't meet all the expectations. You're unable to fulfill every obligation. Christmas vacation seems like a distant memory as the burden of all those commitments presses down. It's not like someone else is going to step forward to do everything you can't.

If you've been in a Lutheran congregation for any substantial length of time, you'll have heard that nothing that you or I could do would be able meet God's expectation for perfection in our lives. And that's entirely true! But even knowing that, we so often try to accomplish things – including our life together as the Church – under our own steam. With this “do it yourself” attitude, then, it shouldn't come as a surprise that Christians might either quietly back away from or get burned out in the part of our life together that we call “mission work.” In fact, that name reflects part of the problem: we see “mission” as *our work*, another job that we have to do on top of everything else in our busy and overcommitted lives, a task for which you have to be trained and competent, not to be taken up by the everyday Christian (so that they don't give a bad or misleading witness to the world). Here's the thing, though: **mission is Jesus' work!**

Jesus is on a mission for you. Today we remember Jesus' baptism by John in the River Jordan. Right there, at the very start of his public ministry, the Messiah is already doing what he entered our broken world to do. Jesus is the one who steps forward, taking your place and my place before God, doing everything that we should do, everything we're unable to do.

Jesus didn't need to undergo John's baptism of repentance for himself. He's the sinless Son of God; there's nothing for which he'd need to repent! But Jesus goes to be baptized by John to stand in for us. At his baptism, Jesus is identifying himself with God's people. He there as the representative of the people of Israel – the people considered God's “son” in the Old Testament – but he's also there in the place of all of the rest of humanity, because his mission was for everyone.

What was Jesus' mission? Take a look back to the third week of Advent and the appointed reading from Isaiah 61:1. “*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound...*” He brings the Good News of life with God that cannot be broken by death, and freedom from slavery to sin. Jesus is the Servant of Yahweh foretold by Isaiah who would make all this possible. **Jesus' mission is to unite people with God.**

At his baptism, standing in for us and for all people, Jesus does what needs to be done. He receives the baptism of repentance because you and I do need to repent of our sins, to turn away from all those thoughts,

words, and deeds that are separating us from our Lord. Jesus does what needs to be done because he doesn't want us to end up dead.

This week at St. John's, we gathered together under the cross of Christ for two funerals, celebrating and giving thanks for the lives of two people who were baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection. Christian baptism is, in part, a baptism of repentance. It acknowledges that we are broken by sin and can't meet God's expectations of perfection. But most importantly, Christian baptism is **baptism into Christ**; that is, it identifies the baptized with Jesus. In today's reading from Romans 6, we hear why that's indeed Good News, especially when we face the shadow of death. The person who is united with Jesus in baptism receives the outcome of the Messiah's mission: a forgiven, new, lasting life in peace with God.

Jesus is on a mission for you. He works in your place, and he works for your benefit. **And if you've been baptized into Jesus, you've been baptized into his mission.**

As a baptized Christian, you are a part of Jesus' mission to unite people with God. In this season of Epiphany, our congregation here at St. John's is emphasizing **Being SJLC – Serving Jesus, Living in Community**. We're using the book *Joining Jesus on His Mission: How to Be an Everyday Missionary* as a focus for this time together so that we may each better understand and participate in Jesus' mission to the world around us.

As a baptized Christian, every day you live is a "mission trip" into the world around you. But mission is Jesus' work; it's not another job that we have to do on top of everything else in our busy and overcommitted lives. Jesus is already out there in the world, doing the heavy lifting of working in the lives of every person you meet. He is there for Jewish people and Muslim people and atheist people and uncommitted people. He stepped forward to do everything that they can't, everything that you can't. Jesus is on a mission for you; Jesus is on a mission for *them*, too.

What does Jesus' mission look like? Join us in the upcoming weeks of **Being SJLC** as we see that together!

At his baptism, Jesus took our place. He took on all the obligations of living a perfect life and all the expectations of righteousness that God has for us. United with Christ at his baptism, then, hear the Father's words, uttered as the heavens split open: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."
Amen.