

Matthew 3:13-17 Then Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John at the Jordan. ¹⁴But John tried to stop him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?”

¹⁵But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, because it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John let him. ¹⁶After Jesus was baptized, he immediately went up out of the water. Suddenly, the heavens were opened for him! He saw the Spirit of God, descending like a dove and landing on him, ¹⁷and a voice out of the heavens said, “This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. There are so many aspects of Jesus’ baptism we could focus on: John trying to stop Jesus, not understanding the significance of Jesus’ baptism. Jesus talking about how it fulfills all righteousness, as the event brought John’s ministry to a close and Jesus’ to start. How Jesus stepped into his public role as our substitute, baptized not for his sins, but for the sins he would carry to the cross — the sins one the world, yours and mine. The presence of the Trinity, Father’s voice from heaven, the Holy Spirit descending, Jesus standing at the edge of the water. But since this reading comes up every single year on the first Sunday after Epiphany, we don’t have to try to focus on every one of those things today. No, today are focus turns to the words of the Father, his Baptismal address, we could call it. Short though it was, it brought untold comfort, confidence, and peace for Jesus, and for us.

This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him.

Without giving too much away from next week’s reading of Satan’s temptations of Jesus, we are familiar with the devil’s tactics — his continual insistence that we turn from God’s Word and do our own thing, what we want to do, what I want to do. “Did God really say...” was the trap he laid for Adam and Eve, and it’s the trap he lays for us too.

Did God really say that’s wrong... for you? Did God really say that your faith will be damaged by feeding the flesh and starving the spirit? And after spewing lies about what God did say he tells you things he didn’t say, like, “God says you should be happy all the time. You deserve it. How can it be wrong if it makes you happy? If it feels good? If it’s not hurting anyone?” And often, as with Adam and Eve, he goes so far to paint God as the bad guy, the one withholding happiness and fulfillment from us, trying to convince us that God’s rules and will are designed to *keep* us from being happy, obviously!

As human beings susceptible to temptation, we stumble and fall into sin. And if we’re honest, the landmines the devil so carefully hides in our paths, are often times overkill, as our sinful natures trip on the log seen a mile away.

It’s hard, fighting against the devil, the sinful world. For sinners, dragging around and living in our sinful flesh 24/7, it’s impossible. It’s impossible for us to not be sinners.

Again, without giving too much away from next week, this was the same tactic the devil used on Jesus immediately following his baptism. “**If you are the son of God...**” In other words, “Don’t listen to what God’s Word says. Listen instead to these lies I have concocted specifically for you to tempt you to sin.”

And while certainly Jesus was not a sinner — as True God he didn’t have a sinful nature and could not sin — like Adam and Eve before the fall, his perfect human nature had ears. He could hear the temptations the devil dangled before him. One path, the cross, looked extremely hard, difficult, painful, and unpleasant to say the least— so much so that we hear him in anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane praying, “if it’s possible, if there is another way, take this cup from me.” The other path presented by the devil seemed and appeared to be much easier.

Where we fall short, where we listen to the devil and disregard God’s Word, will, and ways, Jesus didn’t. And before he got to the specific parts of God’s Word he used against the devil, no doubt these words of the Father at his baptism were still fresh in his mind. “**This is my Son, whom I love.**”

How comforting those words must have been, giving him the reassurance and confidence he needed to stand firm on the rest of the Words and promises of God. “**If you are the Son of God?**” Satan said, but there was no *if* about it at all. God the Father had said it, decreed it, announced it for all to hear, for *Jesus* to hear: **This is my Son!** How those words must have been with Jesus throughout his three year ministry through every challenge and opposing spirit. In fact, so important were they to him that we’ll hear them again near the end of his earthly ministry, 6 Sundays from now on the last Sunday of Epiphany, another decree from his Father at his Transfiguration as he set out to take up the cross for us. “**This is my Son!**”

And as Matthew records these words spoken about Jesus, there is comfort for us too. **This is my Son**, notice spoken not to Jesus, but about him to the world, to us.

Sometimes we may wonder, “Why didn’t Jesus just come out and say he was God’s Son, the Savior.” And yet, he did, standing before the high priest on Good Friday. **“Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God?”** Jesus answered, **“Yes. It is as you say.”** And yet, he didn’t have to say anything. How much more definitive testimony can you get - These words, this declaration, came from God himself! The heavens opened and the Father’s voice boomed down to his creation - **“THIS IS MY SON!”**

Yes we are familiar with the devil’s tactics. Yes we are sinners who sin, that’s no surprise, either. But here is something else we know: Jesus is God’s Son, our Savior. He is the one God promised in the Garden of Eden moments after Adam and Eve fell into sin. The perfect Savior sent from heaven — God and Man — to be one of us, to be one with us, living under God’s law perfectly for us. And suffering under God’s wrath on the cross for the sins of the world, the holy, precious blood of God’s Son paid their price, our price, in full.

The declarations, This is my son, spoken at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, and again as it came to a close, serve as two wonderfully comforting bookends to Jesus’ work for our salvation. Through it all they bring us this comforting confidence: There is no question, Jesus is our Savior!

And there’s more. **“This is my Son. I am well pleased with him.”** God was pleased with Jesus. Those words had not been spoken about a human being since before the fall into sin. Now they had been spoken again. As a human being, 30 years old, Jesus was doing everything right. He had perfectly kept God’s law from start to finish. There was not a single spot, or blemish, or mark against him.

And God was pleased with him for another reason too. As he presented himself to John the Baptist at the Jordan river, Jesus was publicly stepping into his role as the Savior of the world, the sacrificial lamb who would shed his blood for the sins of the world. This pleased the Father, that Jesus was following his will, fulfilling the purpose for which he had been sent.

these words give us confidence as we look to our Savior. As we come to him covered again in guilt and shame and weakness and failure, Jesus didn’t just do a pretty good job at taking away our sins. God the Father who standard is perfection was pleased with his work and would see it through to completion. Every sin, all our shame, all our guilt, all our failures and weakness Jesus has paid their price, taken them away,

removed them as far as the east is from the west. Be comforted with this confidence — Jesus lived perfectly for you and met the demands of his father. Jesus died for you and met the standard of God’s justice for all your sins.

There’s just one more thing. It always kind of bugged me a little bit. The Father said, **“This is my Son, whom I love.”** It always kind of struck me — you love him, and you sent him to die. What kind of love is that? What kind of Father says he loves his son and then sends him off to die. And for who? Imperfect, wicked, and depraved sinners. Does that sound right to you? Is that love?

But then it struck me. That part of the message was more for us than for Jesus. God is showing us not how much he loves his Son, but how much he loves us. How much he loves you and me. What can you say to such love? The author of creation, the creator of life sent his Son to die for *us*. It leaves us speechless. But not action-less! What better way to honor our God’s love toward us that gave us his son, than to trust his words and promises? If he did not withhold his Son, who he loves, for our salvation, will he stop at anything? What better reason is there to tell the devil to get lost, to let the world say what they will, to drown our sinful flesh daily in the waters of our baptisms, than the message, **“This is my Son, whom I love”** and I sent him to die for you?

As we continue our journey through this life, where else can we find such comfort, confidence, and peace? Jesus stayed the course, confident of his Father’s love. And we too, by our own baptisms are confident of the same love of our Father. While there are a lot of parts we could focus on in Jesus’ baptism, today and always, remember the Father’s words. They were spoken for Jesus, they were spoken for you. Amen