

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

What God does in the world, He does through His Son — as in the creation: the Word spoke the creative words “*Let there be ...*,” and “*there was.*” Light came into being and shone forth in the darkness; day was separated from the night.

The Word spoke again, and the waters above were separated from the waters below — heaven and earth came into being. And the pattern continued. The Word spoke: “*Let*” this or that happen, and “*it was so.*” “*By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host*” (Ps. 33:6).

You can read what Luther said about the creation in our insert: “God ... does not manifest Himself except through His works and the Word, because the meaning of these is understood in some measure” (*Luther’s Works*, 1:11). Thus, we are without excuse, St. Paul says. When we look out at creation, we see in it God’s “*eternal power and divine nature*” (Rom. 1:20), and we know: God did this, and He did it through the Son. As St. Paul says, “*by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible*” (Col. 1:16).

But it’s not so just about the act of creation. God the Father acted within His creation for our redemption through the same Word, through His only Son. That was the Father’s purpose in sending His Son, that we “*should not perish but have everlasting life*” (John 3:16). Through Jesus, God the Father has reconciled us to Himself — He has reconciled “*all things*” to Himself. Again, He did it through His Son, who made “*peace [for us] by the blood of his cross*” (Col. 1:20). Through His Son, God the Father “*has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us*” (Col. 1:13) to that “*kingdom [without] end*” (Luke 1:33) as the angel told Jesus’ mother. In this beloved Son, “*we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*” (Col. 1:13).

We heard this last Sunday. Jesus was consecrated not for Himself, but to redeem us. He is the “*consolation of Israel,*” the “*redemption of Jerusalem*” (Luke 2:25, 38). God the Father, “*our Savior,*” wants our salvation. He does not want us to die eternally. He wants us to live (Ezek. 18:32); He wants us to know the truth; and so He sent His Son into our flesh, “*the man Christ Jesus,*” as a mediator between God and us, giving His own life as the redemption price for us all (1 Tim. 2:3-6). This was the Father’s will, and the Son accomplished it by His blood. By His sacrifice, He served not Himself but us.

It’s why He came into our flesh; it’s why He was circumcised and presented at the temple; it’s why He was baptized: not for Himself, but for us.

Servanthood requires humility, St. Paul reminds us. In humility, Jesus was “*born in the likeness of men*” (Phil. 2:7), and in humility, Jesus submitted Himself

to John's baptism, not because He needed it, but because men do. John's baptism was "*a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*" The people were coming to John "*confessing their sins.*" Jesus had no sins to confess; He needed no forgiveness. He was baptized identifying with sinful men ... in solidarity with sinners.

His holy body stepped into the Jordan River sinless; His holy body stepped out covered with sin, our sin, "*the LORD [having] laid on him the iniquity of us all*" (Isa. 53:6). And this, so that bearing our iniquities, He might "*make [us] to be accounted righteous*" (Isa. 53:11).

And when Jesus stepped out of the water, He left behind consecrated water — that's the way Luther talked, and church fathers, too. He left behind water set apart for us to use in the baptism Jesus would institute (Matt. 28:19) ... water that when included in God's command and combined with His word (Small Catechism, Baptism, First) becomes a "pure water, freely flowing" (LSB406), not just the Jordan River — we don't need to be baptized in the Jordan River — but all water ... water made clean by the Word that, when sprinkled on us, cleanses us from all our uncleannesses, and from our idolatries ... water that gives us a new heart and puts in us a new spirit (Ezek. 36:25-26). As the Baptist proclaimed: "*he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit*"; and Peter did, too, saying: in baptism "*you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:38).

For when Jesus was baptized by John and He clamored up the bank, the heavens were torn open and the Holy Spirit descended not just upon Jesus, but into Him. Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit, anointed as the Christ, and empowered by the Spirit for the servant role the Father sent Him to accomplish: "*to bring forth justice to the nations*" (Isa. 42:1).

And you know what this justice cost Him! The innocent Son of God falsely accused, wrongly convicted, sentenced to death. A servant stricken, smitten, and afflicted. What groaning; what grief! Insulted; disowned; rejected; wounded; unto death! "O sorrow dread! Our God is dead, Upon the cross extended" (LSB448:2). And yet, "the deepest stroke that pierced Him Was the stroke that justice gave" (LSB451).

Jesus' death was the matching bookend to His baptism. In dying, Jesus breathed out the Holy Spirit and the heavens were torn apart again in the temple's curtain, torn from top to bottom, that all the world might hear again, and believe, and every tongue confess: "*Truly this man was the Son of God*" (Mark 15:39). "*Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Phil. 2:10).

It is to the Father's glory to confess this, for when the heaven's were torn apart at Jesus' baptism, not only did the Holy Spirit come down, but the Father's voice

from heaven thundered forth for us to hear along with Jesus: *“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”* The Father is pleased with Jesus standing there in all humility, identifying with us sinners in our wretched state. The Father is pleased with the One in whom we were chosen even before the world was created. The Father is pleased with Him who was sent to accomplish the Father’s will — our redemption. The Father is pleased with His beloved Son, and so are we . . . and we are assured in Him.

Moreover, seeing God’s beloved Son suffering and dying for us gives us strength and stamina in our own sufferings. We trust that God has not forsaken us, but rather, in Christ, baptized into Him, He is well pleased with us, too, that He is for us. And we can be *“sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 8:38-39).

Rejoice, therefore, in Jesus’ baptism and in our own — in what they do and what they signify — for what Jesus did through His baptism comes now to us: forgiveness by water and the word, Christ’s righteousness by this cleansing water, the Holy Spirit and faith in these Spirit-filled waters. By our baptisms, we are born of God, made new creations in Christ. By our baptisms, we are given the blessings of sonship through God’s own Son. And, assured of our eternal inheritance, we await everlasting life.

This is what Christ was sent to do: more than creation, He accomplished our re-creation to the glory of the Triune God. Let us rejoice and be glad in that.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.