

Text: Luke 3:21,22.      Baptism of Our Lord.      **January 3, 2016.**

Now rise, faint heart, be resolute. This man is Christ, our Substitute. Amen.

Aren't there times you wish you could have someone do something in your place? Wouldn't it be nice if, just every so often, you could "tap out," have someone else do it for you? Maybe you have a quarterly report due to your boss. You dread it every time. What if someone else would do the report and meet with the boss? Cool, huh? Well, maybe not. What if this other guy doesn't do a good job and I get blamed for his work? What if he does a good job and takes all the credit and I get fired because I'm not needed anymore? What if that substitute, that tap out, what if he did all the work, gave you all the credit and took all the blame for all your screw ups? Whoa! That would be a cool substitute.

What about at school? I would venture a guess that there is at least one class you wish you could have someone else sit in your spot. And we won't get into rumors at certain schools about paying someone to sit in your seat or paying for the class notes from the smartest kid. That's not so cool. But what if there were a substitute student, not a substitute teacher, but a substitute student, who would do the work, get straight As all the time, never even one wrong. Then at report card time, he would write your name on his straight As. And if you ever made a mistake on any assignment, he would fix the mistake before the teacher ever saw it? Where do I find this guy? You have a book, probably several, and an app on your phone to find him. How much does he charge? Nothing. He does this all for free. That Substitute is Jesus. Jesus did all the work. Jesus gives you all the credit. Jesus takes all your blame. That's some Substitute! That's Jesus! Jesus is your Substitute!

Look at the people with whom Jesus identified: sinners! Jesus went to a dirty river to identify with people who knew they were sinful, repented of their sins and desired to have those filthy sins washed clean in that river. Jesus didn't go to Jerusalem, where the religious elite were, to identify with them. Jesus didn't storm into the temple and force the high priest out of the way. Jesus went where the ordinary people were. Jesus went to identify with sinners, to take our place, to be our Substitute.

Jesus went to be baptized. Now, why? At first glance, this doesn't make any sense. We are baptized to have our sins washed away. Jesus didn't have any sins to be washed away. We are baptized to be declared God's child. Jesus was God's only begotten Son from all eternity. What's going on here? Jesus was baptized to identify with sinners. Jesus was baptized to take the place of sinners. Jesus was baptized to show, "I will stand in your place. I will take on your sins. I will give you my perfection." Jesus was baptized to show he became one with sinners.

Would you classify yourself as a sinner? Well of course, no body's perfect. But really? Do you really think you need a Substitute? From little on, we are taught and we've thought, "I can do it myself!" I can tie my shoes (until they come untied). I can pour my milk (until it spills all over the table. Don't cry over it!) And yes, we even carry that attitude over to spiritual things. I can do it myself. I can get to heaven on my own. I'm a good person. I come to church. Even when it's freezing cold. I stick around for Bible class, not like those other people. I've made some mistakes, but I apologized. I fixed them. I'm ok. I can do it myself. You know what God thinks about that attitude? Yeah, you can do it yourself, but all you can do is sin. Yeah, you can do it yourself, if you want to build the highway to hell.

I can't do myself. But Jesus did. Jesus is your Substitute. Jesus lived a perfectly obedient life. In your place. Jesus carried his obedience all the way to death, even death on a cross. Yes! Jesus died, an

innocent death, on the cross, just for you. Jesus rose, from the dead, to prove all your sins are forgiven, to prove he is your perfect Substitute. Jesus did it. All by himself. He lived. He died. He rose.

But what Jesus did by himself, he didn't do for himself. Jesus did it for you. And Jesus applied it to you in baptism. It's striking how many similarities there are between Jesus' death and resurrection and our baptism. The Bible declares, "Jesus died and rose again. You died in baptism to your old sinful way of life and a new person, a holy person, a person with love for Jesus, rose. Your life started all over in baptism, because in baptism you were connected to Jesus, your perfect Substitute. His perfect life became your perfect life. His death on the cross is your death to sin. His rising from the grave is your rising to a new and holy life." Wow! There's a reason we celebrate Jesus' baptism every year. It reminds us of how wonderful baptism is.

We remember the great power baptism has. Jesus' baptism didn't place power on him. Jesus gave power to baptism to wash away sin, to declare to each and every baptized person, "You are a child of God!" Baptism has power from Jesus to raise us to a new and holy life, a life that says, "I don't pick on kids on the playground because I'm baptized. I don't slack off at work, even when I could get away with it because I'm baptized. I'm a new person. I'm living a new life. I'm always assured of God's love. I'm always resting in his arms. My sins are always forgiven."

Can you see why we give baptism this great honor? Jesus, our Substitute, gave baptism great honor. Can you see why we normally place the font at the entrance to the church, not at the back of the church, but at the entrance to the church? We want to be reminded every time we enter, "I am baptized! I am God's child! Jesus, my perfect Substitute, took my place." Now, I know we moved the font front and center today. That always makes some people ask, "Who's being baptized today?" Jesus, our Substitute.

Jesus, your only Substitute. Did you catch the amazing scene at Jesus' baptism? It's a wow! No wonder we have a window dedicated to it. Jesus was praying. Did you notice that? Jesus was praying while he was being baptized. Maybe not a bad thing to do. It only gets more amazing after that. Heaven was opened! Heaven was opened! Heaven. Was opened! What would that look like? This is more than just a few clouds parting for a couple of seconds. Heaven was opened! What would you see? Did anyone get to see the angels standing around God's throne? Did anyone get to see believers praising God and wearing white robes and smiling and feasting and eternal bliss? Heaven was opened. Why didn't God tell us what they saw? Maybe it's just too much to take in.

Anyone there, and we don't know exactly who was there other than John the Baptist who had the beyond awesome privilege to baptize Jesus, anyone there did see God and hear God. Wow! What an amazing scene, as if heaven opened wasn't enough. See God? Hear God? Yes! God himself, the Holy Spirit, descended on Jesus in bodily form like a dove. Now the dove is a symbol of holiness, purity. But more than that. This was a big arrow, pointing at Jesus. This was the Holy Spirit not just saying, but showing, "This is the One! This is the Substitute! This is the Savior! Follow him! Worship him! He is the one. Don't look for any other." The Holy Spirit could not have made it any more plain. At no other time, anywhere else in all the Bible, did the Holy Spirit come down as a dove and land on one person. This man is Christ, our Substitute! God showed it.

God told it. A voice came from the open heavens. "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." The scene keeps on getting more amazing. See Jesus. See the Holy Spirit. Hear God the Father. God can only be pleased with perfection. Good enough is good enough for people. Good enough is not

good enough for God. For God to be pleased with Jesus, Jesus had to be perfect. And Jesus was. For God to be pleased with you, you have to be perfect. And in God's eyes, you are! Without holiness no one will see the Lord. But you have the holiness of your Substitute on your account with God. In God's eyes, you are holy. Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? Only the one with clean hands and a pure heart. Jesus, your Substitute, washed your hands clean of every sin. Jesus created in you a pure heart when he baptized you. The all-seeing God doesn't see your sins. The all-seeing God puts on the Jesus glasses and God only sees the holiness, the perfection of your perfect Substitute. God was pleased with Jesus, so God is pleased with you. How amazing is that scene now?

One time in Catechism class with 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, we were trying to illustrate what it's like that Jesus is our Substitute. You can talk all you want about the fine theological points. Jesus took our sins and traded them in for his holiness. Jesus paid the debt of our sins in full and in exchange God declares us righteous. And that's wonderful and true. But the students needed something more to drive it home. I said, "Imagine you were bouncing a basketball around the house. Your older brother told you, 'Don't do that. You are going to break something.' But you ignored him. Kept playing with the basketball and sure enough, you broke your mother's favorite vase on the living room table. Mom hears the sound, comes running into the room. Your brother has picked up the ball. He's standing there. Holding it. He says, 'Mom, I broke the vase.'" I remember one student instantly yelling out, "My brother would never do that!" Exactly. Your brother would never do that. But Jesus, your brother, did do that. Jesus, your Substitute, did exactly that. Amen.