

Our Baptism Has Made Us One
Sermon on Ephesians 4:1-6
Saint Mark's Watertown
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January 11, 2004

The Scriptures say regarding baptism: *We were buried with Christ through baptism into death: in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.* Amen.

God's Word for our special consideration on this Festival of the Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ is Ephesians chapter four, verses one through six:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit -- just as you were called to one hope when you were called -- one Lord, one faith, one BAPTISM; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word of Jesus Christ.

Introduction: We Reflect a Diversity in the Externals of Baptism

Dear fellow children of God, brothers and sisters through Christ Jesus:

I'm going to start this sermon out interactively. Now, that's a little different, so I want to ease us into it. What I'm going to do is to ask you about the circumstances of your baptism. I'm going to ask you questions and have you raise your hands to answer them. Now, for some of these questions, practically everybody will raise their hands, and for some of these questions, only a few of you will raise your hands—but don't feel self-conscious about that; there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. In fact, if you're one of only a few who raise your hand, that makes you special.

Are you ready? This first one is a "warm-up". How many of you are baptized? Raise your hands! (Come on..., you can do it..., give yourself some exercise....) Good! See, that wasn't hard! I was guessing I'd see most of your hands held high. In fact, it is possible that every soul present here today is baptized. And that's great!

Now, it gets a little harder. Think about it: Where were you baptized? How many of you were baptized inside a church building? Raise your hands! How many of you were not baptized inside a church building? Maybe you were baptized at home or in a hospital. Raise your hands! ...Actually, personally, three out of four of my children were baptized in a hospital; they kept coming out early and in distress and I needed to baptize them right away.

Okay, here's another question. Think about it: In what language were you baptized? I imagine most of us were baptized in English. If you were baptized in English, raise your hands! Is there anyone here who was baptized in a different language—maybe probably many years ago in German? Raise your hands! ...This isn't such a far out question; actually, personally, in the past few years here at Saint Mark's, I've had the privilege of baptizing souls in three different languages.

How about another one? Again, think about it: At what age were you baptized? I imagine most of you were baptized as babies. If you were baptized in your first year of life, raise your hands! On the other hand, I know that no few of our members were baptized later. If you were baptized sometime past your first birthday, raise your hands!

You know, here at Saint Mark's, we were privileged to baptize ten adults this past year. I can't begin to tell you how remarkable that is.

Okay, we're getting toward the end. By whom were you baptized? I mean: probably a lot of us were baptized by a Lutheran pastor. If you were, raise your hands! On the other hand, no few of us were baptized by an individual from a different sort of Christian church. If you were, raise your hand! Yeah, I know a lot of our members were baptized – for example – in Roman Catholic churches, kind of like one rather famous Lutheran I know, named Martin Luther.

Here's the last one: How many of you were baptized *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*? Come one, raise your hands! If you were baptized at all – really baptized – it was *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*.

And there's an important message there. And this is what I wanted to get at. If you and I were baptized with water in the name of the Triune God, then we have the same baptism. Then it doesn't matter where we were baptized, because each of us was baptized into the one Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. And it doesn't really matter in what language we were baptized, because each of us was baptized into the family of God. And it doesn't ultimately matter at what age we were baptized – although: the earlier, the better – we each got adopted into God's family. And it doesn't really matter who baptized us, because it was really Jesus who baptized us; it's his own words that were used.

Theme: Our Baptism Has Made Us One

God's Word to us today has us underlining all this and applying it to ourselves. In brief, it tells us: * OUR BAPTISM HAS MADE US ONE. I hope we'll decide this: (1) BECAUSE WE ARE MEMBERS OF THE SAME FAMILY, (2) LET'S BE EAGER TO GUARD OUR UNITY!

Part One: Christians Are Members of the Same Family

The Holy Spirit prompted the Apostle Paul to write God's Word to us this morning. It was about the year sixty AD, about thirty years after Jesus had died to deliver us from our sins and risen to deliver us into heaven. Paul was in prison in Rome for proclaiming Jesus as the Savior of all. He was writing back – over the distance of about eight hundred miles – to his congregation in Ephesus, in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. And in the second part of God's Word to us today, Paul emphasizes his unity with those Christian people, and their unity with him, and their unity with one another, and our unity together.

He writes: *There is one body and one Spirit*. Well, first of all, that's true regarding human beings. Each one has one body and one spirit, and they are united. And Paul is saying that the same is true among God's people. There is *one body*, the Church. And there is *one Spirit*, the Holy Spirit. No matter how many members there are in God's Holy Christian Church, they have a single Spirit. Now: that's unity!

And Paul goes on to say: *just as you were called to one hope when you were called*. When did Christians get called? Well, it was at the time of their baptism, when God literally called them by name to belong to him. And like it says here, Christians were all called to a single hope—the future certainty of eternal life. Now: that's unity!

And finally, Paul really emphasizes that unity. He says Christians have: *one Lord*. No matter how many Christians there are, they all have a single Lord: our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul writes that Christians have; *one faith*. No matter how many Christians there are, they all trust the same true and Triune God, and they acknowledge

that through Jesus Christ he forgives the sins of their souls and raises their bodies from death. And Paul says: Christians share **one BAPTISM**—we mentioned that before: water applied *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*.

So, there is **one God and Father of all**. Every Christian has the same Dad: God the Father. That makes every Christian a brother or sister of every other Christian. And furthermore and finally, it is that one Father, God the Father, **who is over all**; he directs us by his authority, **and through all**; he does his work through us, **and in all**; he is inside each Christian.

Application One: We Are Members of the Same Family

Wow! Isn't that cozy?! Isn't that comfortable?! Doesn't it touch your heart?

As Christians, God is our Dad. If God is our Dad, can we ever lack for what we need? If God is our Dad, will we ever lack for protection? Of course not! If God is our Dad, can we fail to live in his household, both now and eternally? No! We were baptized and adopted in the name of the Father!

And if God is our Dad, Jesus – God's Son – is our Brother. It's inescapable! And what do big brothers like Jesus Christ do for little brothers and sisters like you and me. Well, if a bully threatens us – honestly threatens us – he repels the bully.

Satan was the bully that threatened us. He picked on us—to sin. He abused us—finally, to kill us. And then he planned to drag our dead body off to be with him—in hell. But Jesus stepped in and beat him up for us. Jesus bashed his head in – *he crushed the serpent's head!* – for us. Yeah, it killed Jesus, too, but three days later, he rose.

And we were baptized in his name. So, his victory became our victory. And we will rise from the dead.

And as Christians, God the Holy Spirit is our Spirit. He inhabits each of our hearts. He gives us a common DNA. He adopted us in baptism. And he makes us share one blood—actually, pretty literally, in Lord's Supper.

So: Our Baptism Has Made Us One. We are members of the same family.

(We'll break to sing Hymn 79, verses 4 & 5)

Part Two: Christians Are Eager to Guard Their Unity

Our Baptism Has Made Us One. We are members of the same family. And that has some blessed implications for the way we live our lives together. Take a look at what Paul says in the early part of God's Word to us today: ***As a prisoner for the Lord, then*** – remember, Paul was in jail for preaching the gospel – ***I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.*** “God called you his in baptism. So, live like it.”

And what does that mean? Paul goes on: ***Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*** Chiefly, chiefly: ***Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.***

Application Two: We Are Eager to Guard Our Unity

Humbly and gently, patiently and lovingly: *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

That means: if you've wronged your fellow Christian, even if he has wronged you worse—if you've wronged your fellow Christian, you'll confess to him your sin, ask his forgiveness, and aim not to follow your pattern of sin. That's: *making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

And maybe you've wronged many fellow Christians. What I mean is: maybe your obvious sin has become widely known. Maybe you've committed a crime, and it's gotten published. Maybe you just talk about people behind their back, and everybody knows it. Maybe you have pursued and obtained an ungodly divorce—not for reasons of adultery or abandonment. Maybe you are cohabiting outside of marriage. Maybe you are a drunkard or a drug addict. Maybe you've been misbehaving, even very publicly, on your parents or your teachers. Maybe you habitually use really bad language.

Or maybe – and, arguably, this applies to more Christians than all the rest of what I've been mentioning – maybe you're rarely in any church, and you have no excuse, and you're leaving the impression that worshipping the Lord and singing his praises and praying to him and hearing his Word and encouraging other Christians is a “take it or leave it” kind of thing.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Friend, confess your pattern of sinfulness. Don't defend it. Certainly confess it to God. Maybe even confess it to some flesh-and-blood individual: your spouse, your parents, your children, your dear Christian friend, your pastor. And Jesus has forgiven that sin. And in fact, that's what your dear friend had better tell you. He or she will say to you, “I forgive you. And Jesus forgives you. That's what Jesus was doing on the cross. That's why we need him. That's why we have him on the cross in front of our church. Jesus doesn't even remember those sins of yours any more. And I don't either.”

Now, with your sins forgiven, you're in a position to benefit others. Maybe you know a Christian friend who is caught in an obvious pattern of sin. You're tempted to ignore it and say, “Well, I sin, too. And after all, Jesus forgives. So, it's really no big deal.” Well, friend: You can't ignore your loved one's obvious public pattern of sin, because it's dangerous for that person you care about. That person, rather than hearing God's Word and trusting it and practicing it—that person is ignoring God's Word and failing to trust it and practicing himself in disobeying it. And your love is going to lead you to speak to him about it. You'll *make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

Oh, let me give you an example. Your son, who hasn't regularly been in church since early high school, moves out and moves in with his girlfriend. Okay, what do you do? Well, you pray. And you pick a good time to visit them both. And you pray some more. And you visit and say, “Guys, I love you. Son, I love you no matter what. I'm always going to love you. I love your girlfriend, too. And because I love the two of you, I want to share something with you....”

“Have you ever considered how precious marriage is? When two people are married, they can count on each other to be there for each other. When two people are married and kids come along, and that happens when men and women live together, you know—when kids come along and their parents are married, the kids know both Mom and Dad will always be there to love them. And when two people are married and they are intimate, it's not selfishly for their own pleasure, they're not auditioning for each other, it's genuine love, and it is marvelous. I want you to have that someday—maybe together, or else with others.”

“Now, I want you to think about that, and talk that over, and I'm going to visit with you again in a couple of weeks—because I love you, and I'm always going to love you.”

“Oh, there's something else. And it's more important. I've got one greatest pleasure in my life. And it's not my marriage. It's the comfort I've got, knowing God is my Father. It's the relief I've got, knowing Jesus took my sins away. It's the energy I've got, knowing that the Holy Spirit lives in me. I want to share all of that with you. And a big part of all that comfort I get from going to church. How about I drop by this coming

Sunday at ten-fifteen, or this coming Saturday at five-thirty, and we'll go to church together?" Oh, and if that doesn't work, phone them and invite them again the next week!

That, my friends, is *making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*. That's the implications of your baptism. Our Baptism Has Made Us One. Because we are members of the same family, let's be eager to guard our unity!

Conclusion: Our Baptism Reflects a Unity with Christ

And isn't that a part of the reason for the festival we are celebrating today? We are celebrating the Festival of the Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe you're like me, and you have asked, "Why did Jesus get baptized anyway? He had no sins to wash away!" And that is true. But his baptism still made him one with us. And our baptism made us one with him.

That's why he got baptized. And that's why we got baptized. And it means for us nothing less than eternal life with him. What a message to know! What a message to cherish! What a message to share! ...Amen.

The Scriptures say regarding baptism: *God saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal – baptism! – by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Lord, so that: having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life.* Amen.