2023-01-20: Theophany, Baptism, and Sanctification

Objective

- Understanding the place baptism has in the Scripture, History and Tradition
- Understanding the preciousness of the gift that we have received in our baptism

Key Verse

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3)

Body

Introduction

- When you are a kid, we always learn "Christ was baptized in order to set an example for us to be baptized and baptism is removing our sins."
- None of this is wrong, but as high school seniors, we want to go deeper. We might have questions like "if Baptism replaced Circumcision, why was Jesus Circumcised AND Baptized?" or "if Baptism is to remove sin, why was Jesus baptized?" or "what is baptism and why did St John start doing it"
- We want to understand what was happening in the Old Testament with Circumcision, where did Baptism come from? what happened at the baptism of Christ, what the Apostles and the Church taught about Baptism, what happens when I am baptized, etc.

What was the Purpose of Circumcision?

- Circumcision came as a sign of the covenant made between God and Abraham in Genesis 17
- A Covenant has two sides - on God's side, He will establish the descendants of Abraham as a nation, He will give them the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession, and He shall be their God. On Abraham's side, they must be circumcised
- God deigned to bring salvation upon the world through the incarnation of the Logos IN THE BEGINNING. And He foreknew everything.
- Part of this economy of salvation was that God would not take one of the existing nations and become their God - for example, He did not go to the Canaanites and become their God. He did not go to the Hittites or the Amorites or the Amalekites. Of the 70 nations listed in Genesis 10, the descendants of Noah and those that were scattered after Babel, God did not choose any of those families. But rather, He chose Abraham and brought from him a new family. God's family. And Circumcision would be the sign of participation or

membership in this family. It would be a sign that you forsake everything else and become one of God's family.
- Circumcision was participation with God in His covenant with Abraham
- Not to get off topic, but we'll see later on another covenant with Moses at the time of the Exodus, and this would be remembered by the Passover

Where did Baptism come from?

- If you read the Old Testament, you won't see baptism mentioned anywhere. We have types of it like Noah's flood and Moses' crossing the Red Sea and Joshua's crossing the Jordan River - salvation through water. We have other hints like the four rivers that flow into the Garden of Eden that water the Tree of Life, or the Spirit of God that hovered over the waters in the beginning. But Baptism itself is not a regular practice in the Old Testament.
- In the New Testament, St John the Baptist started to baptize people in the Jordan a baptism of repentance
  - Actually, this was not an abnormal practice
  - By the time of the New Testament there are a lot more Jews than before - a lot of people who have a lot of ritual washings to practice. They had the idea of Ritual Impurity and before you could become ritually clean, you had to offer sacrifices and you had to have ritual washings. But there were so many people that it would have been impossible for everyone to wash every day
  - So they setup in the Temple several pools that were used for ritual washings. The people would get in in large groups and come out the other side ritually clean.
- So when John started baptizing, people were not surprised by the practice. But what John was doing was very different
  - He was baptizing in the Jordan on the other side away from the Temple - some people (especially the Sadducees were offended by this and took it as a sign that John was against the Temple)
  - He was baptizing a baptism of repentance - he called the people to "bear fruit worthy of repentance"
  - He was announcing the coming of Someone after Him - the Messiah
  - He was not doing it on his own authority, but he was instructed to by God
    - And John bore witness, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:32-34)
- John's role was forerunner - to prepare the way for the Christ

What happened in the Baptism of Christ?

- The Lord Jesus Christ went to be baptized before beginning His ministry
- He approved of the work that John was doing and asked John to baptize Him, himself
- When Christ entered the water, some things happened:
  - The Father spoke from heaven and affirmed that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah

    - The Holy Spirit showed Himself as a dove and came upon the head of Christ anointing Him as High Priest, as King, as Prophet. These are the three roles that were expected of the Messiah.
        - When the Holy Spirit came upon the Lord, He opened the door for God the Holy Spirit to dwell in humanity, Who we will accept on the day of our Baptism
    - Christ, in the water, conquered the demons and renews the Creation
        - "You have crushed the heads of the dragon hidden therein [in the Jordan]" (Lakkan Liturgy of Water)
        - "You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters. You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces" (Psalm 74:13 - used in the Tasbeha Canticle for Theophany)
        - Creation in Genesis 1 came "out of the waters"
        - God's salvation for Israel through the Red Sea is a type of "new Creation"
- All of these points are important for us in our own baptism

Baptism in the Church

- The Lord Jesus instructed the apostles to baptize all the nations: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)
- Since the beginning, the Church has baptized all believers
    - Acts, the Ethiopian Eunuch who asks "There is water, what prevents me from being baptized now?" and is baptized
    - St Paul was baptized by Ananias

What happens on the day of our Baptism?

- Exorcism
    - "look upon Your creation, this oil, and let it become for the casting out of demons and their magic, sorcery, and all idolatry" (Baptism Prayers)
    - "In the name of the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, may [this body] be delivered from every demon and every uncleanness. Let all darkness flee from this body, and let all unbelieving thoughts flee from this soul. In the name of the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, you shall be purified, and be delivered from all demons forever. Amen." (Baptism Prayers)
    - "I renounce you Satan, and all your unclean works, and all your wicked angels..." - "Come out O unclean spirit." (with the breath of the priest) - (Baptism Prayers)

- Renewed Creation
    - "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (1 Cor 5:17)
    - "Take off the old man and put on the new and superior one" (□□□□□□□□)
    - "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

    - "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6)

- Sanctification
    - The abiding in us of the Holy Spirit
    - The oil of the Myron sanctifies us on:
        - The head, the two nostrils, the mouth, the right ear, the right eye, the left eye, and the left ear (8)
        - The heart, the navel, the back and the spine (4)
        - The right shoulder above and in the armpit, the right elbow joint and around it, the right palm and on its back (6)
        - The left shoulder joint above and in the armpit, the left elbow joint and around it, the left palm and on its back (6)
        - The right hip joint and the right thigh, the right knee joint and around it, the joint of the tendon of the right foot and above it (6)
        - The left hip joint and the left thigh, the left knee joint and around it, the joint of the tendon of the left foot and above it (6)

- We become members of the Body of Christ; the Lord Jesus abides in me and I abide in Him by the receiving of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist
    - This is like the Circumcision and Passover that for Jews meant becoming part of the family of God
    - "Today, you have received the pledge of life and have become rooted in the true and orthodox faith. The day on which you were born, you were a slave and not free. But today, you have become a conqueror over the plots of the wicked."

Application

- You are now part of God's family
    - "Be diligent in learning the holy Scriptures which are the breath of God, and attend church services in the mornings and evenings, and fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays, the Holy Forty Days fast, and all the fasts; and in keeping the Church laws and apostolic commands." (Baptism Commandment)

- Your body and senses are sanctified and sealed with the Holy Myron
    - "Guard yourself and do not go to unsuitable places, so that the Lord may guard you from satanic temptations. Cultivate inside you beautiful qualities. Plant within you righteousness and praise. Pour inside you purity. Plant within you obedience, love and holiness. Plant within you compassion, charity, and justice. Cultivate within you godliness, patience, and goodness. Plant within you honesty and every good work that pleases God so that your soul may live."
    - Don't forget that your mouth is sanctified, to use good language and sing hymns of praise.
    - Don't forget that your ears are sanctified, to listen to words and music that is fitting for them.

- Don't forget that your eyes are sanctified, to see videos and movies and pictures that are holy.

Resources

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