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The Baptism of Our Lord

Romans 6:1-11

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I'm the biological father of three wonderful healthy children. But with the birth of each one, it was only a matter of weeks before . . . I gave them away. On June 24, 2012—23 days after her birthday—I put my daughter up for adoption. Then, on October 18, 2015—just 14 days after being born—I put my oldest son up for adoption. Finally, November 5, 2017—only 16 days from his delivery into this world—my youngest son was up for adoption. You see, each of those dates is the very day they were baptized and *adopted* into the family of God. No longer were they just *my* children, but sons and daughters of the King.

At the font of Holy Baptism, you too have been adopted into God's family. That's why Christians call each other brother and sister. You've heard the expression, "Blood is thicker than water," but in the family of God it's the other way around—*water* is thicker than blood. The water of Baptism ties us to one another like no blood tie ever could. Brothers and sisters, we are God's children now. Adopted into a family more regal than any earthly royalty, more prominent than any peoples of worldly importance, and more almighty than any human powers could ever hope to be. We are part of the eternal household of God, which will last and last forever and ever, and our rule will be without end. That's how great and significant you and I really are.

But isn't it amazing how we can be so great and so significant . . . without ever really knowing it! I mean, we are the light of the world . . . but do we let our lights shine, do we scatter the darkness? We are the salt of the earth . . . but do we add flavor to this land that is so bland without us; are we a preservative to a place that would otherwise rot and decay? We are a royal priesthood, a kingdom and priests to our God, but do we offer our lives in His service . . . or sacrifice ourselves to idols? We are righteous saints, holy and set apart . . . but do we too often get mixed up with the filth of the culture around us? We are to reign with Christ over all things—even the devil is to be a footstool under our feet—but do we get it backwards; are we ever made subject to them? God has made you and I, His children, infinitely more—how could we settle for so little?

Maybe we live as less than God's children because it's so hard to remember who we really are and so easy to forget. After being a pastor for almost ten years now, I've seen how difficult it can be. Children of God have sat down in my office, and shown me what it's like to also be children of men. They've shown me the signs of abuse, remnants of what they've had to suffer long ago. These marks are a daily reminder of their past, which too often defines their present. Usually, such scars were inflicted by a family member, and most often I've found that it's the father. And when they only see themselves as the child of that kind of father, they go without seeing how precious they truly are in the eyes of their heavenly Father.

But the children of God can also bear a different type of scar. Not scars from hurts that others have done to them, but scars that are physical reminders of the deeper hurts they've done to themselves. They cut into their own flesh, making manifest the wounds they bear deep down in their souls. It might be some extreme guilt or some tremendous remorse, and they don't know what else to do with it but to lay it bare for all to see. For them, their mistakes and failures are all that they are, like they'll never add up to anything else. And so they figure they might as well wear it on their sleeves. "I'm no child of God," they tell me. "Why would God ever want me?"

Today, the Church begs and pleads, "Remember your Baptism!" Because we know how easy it is to forget yourself, to live as something you're not, and never become the person you truly are. Maybe you see the scars—physical or psychological—that others inflict on you. Or the scars—physical or psychological—that you inflict on yourself. And because that's all you ever see, you start to believe that that's all you'll ever be. But by Baptism, God has made you. So. Much. More! That's why we beg and plead with you, "Remember your Baptism!"

Because Baptism isn't one and done. It's not over when the waters dries; it's not over when the service is over; it's not over when you get back home. It's not even over years later when you're all grown up, or when you've lost your way, or when you've even forgotten you were baptized to begin with. No, when you're reborn as God's child, you *stay* God's

child forever. If you've let the scars over the years define who you are, let Baptism redefine you again today. Let's "Remember your Baptism."

Let's remember no matter how marked you feel, the mark of Baptism is always bigger and bolder! When you read the Book of Revelation, for instance, you run into this grand scene where all of God's people are crowding around His throne in heaven. And as you look out on the faces of each person in that crowd, you find that on his or her forehead is the very seal of God. Now, without question, none of these folks got through this mortal life without some sort of scar—I mean, many of them were martyrs: skinned alive, crucified upside down, mauled by wild beasts—so isn't it peculiar how we don't find anything about that. No, nothing is mentioned about *those* scars. The only thing that gets described is the proud seal of God—marking His baptized children as His own.

Let's also remember how Baptism covers all of your hurts. In that very same picture of heaven's throne room, Revelation also shows you that by Baptism God wraps you up in a heavenly garment, a robe of righteousness that covers all your sin. God's children are described as having washed their robes (that's baptismal language) and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Because you are now clothed with Christ, the old gets hidden and is replaced instead with the new. When God looks at you, all He sees is perfection—so why should you see anything else?

But most important of all, let's remember how Baptism joins you to the very death and resurrection of your Savior. In the epistle this morning, Paul says, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by Baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

In Holy Baptism, Jesus takes away your sins and the sins that others have done to you—He peels off each of those scars and He places them on Himself. That's why those trenches were plowed into His back. That's why those furrows were dug into His scalp. That's why those hollows were punctured through His hands and His feet. That's why that gash left a gaping hole in His side. Those are your scars—on Him, not you. Bleeding. Dying. Buried. They lie defeated—rendered powerless—unable to hurt you anymore. Baptism has pulled you up and out of that pain with your risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Now, with Him, you stand victorious over them. Through His resurrection, you dear child of God, have overcome!

Now, I know this all sounds easy enough—"Remember your Baptism" and this will all just go away—but there will come days when it's not so easy. At least that's how it is with a lot of people I've worked with. While there's the heavenly reality of who we now are, our flesh can still tell us another story—the story of our earthly reality. But we walk by faith and not by sight. We don't expect our scars to disappear this side of heaven, of course not, but instead we can reimagine them according to our identity as children of God.

Remember how Jesus, even after being raised from the dead, still had scars in His hands, and in His feet, and in His side—that's how the apostles were able to recognize Him. But were those signs of defeat—were they a memory of great loss and setback for Jesus? Absolutely NOT! God had changed them into souvenirs of success, tokens of triumph! In the flesh of Jesus is forever etched the evidence of sin's overthrow and God's conquest! And for you who shares in Christ's victory, that's what your scares have also become—prizes of how you too have prevailed! Instead of holding you back, let them empower you to be propelled into a bold new future!

So, now do you see why we tell you, "Remember your Baptism"? Well, let me share with you a few ways you can do that. Make the sign of the cross over yourself, just like God has marked you and put His seal on your forehead. Begin daily "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"—say it out loud—because those are the powerful words of Baptism by which you were adopted into God's family. Recite the Ten Commandments. Confess the Creed. Pray the Lord's Prayer. Because dear brothers and sisters, you are different now—you are an extraordinary child of God. You are too good for sin—too valuable to sell yourself short—too important to live as anything less. You. Are. Baptized. Remember that and watch your life change for the better. Each and every day, "Remember your Baptism."