**Luke 3:15-22 January 9, 2022**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 3 here re-reading these words. “Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When would you pay, a person? In our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah chapter 43 in verse 4 it says, “Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, **I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life.”** So again I ask you, when would you pay a person? And if you had to pay a person how would you do it? What would be the means of exchanging people? Money changes hands easily in our world today, these days you don’t even have to hand over cash or send checks in the mail it can be done with the click of a mouse. Items and goods are exchanged with people not even meeting, putting items into boxes and shipping them across the world, even paying a mover to show up at someone’s house and get the item that you have bought from them. And money and goods exchange hands without much of a second thought, you can always earn more money, you can buy the item back or get a replacement, it’s a very different situation from paying a person. There is only one of you and I and anyone, people are unique to the world, and so to get them back is of the utmost importance. You’d pay any amount of money or give any item to get back someone that you love, someone who is so special to you that you call them your beloved, the one with whom you are well pleased, the one that you care about more than anyone else, someone like your spouse, your child, the ones that are the dearest to you. If they were in danger, perhaps you would pay a person, someone, maybe someone you don’t know, or someone who has done something wrong, you’d give up their life in exchange for the one you love and rationalize it that they were just wasting away in a prison or under some just sentence for what they had done wrong. You didn’t have any other choice, you had to give up their life, you’d rather have paid money or items but that wasn’t an option. But even then, even if it was a horribly unjust and corrupt and evil person, there’s still the guilt and regret of paying a person, of giving up a life for a life, and again, how would you do it? How would you exchange lives safely? How could you trust someone who was holding another person hostage? It’s a nightmare scenario, but it’s your life. And my life. We are the ones who are being ransomed, and a life must be paid in order to save us.

The Baptism of Our Lord is a significant day because it answers the question of how you would pay a person for a person. The exchange happens in our Baptisms because Christ was baptized not for himself but for us, or to make it personal, for you. The birth of Christ is a wonderful and serene moment in the Church Year, Christmas is a beloved and cozy holiday where we oo and ahh over the baby born and placed into the manger. But children are born every day, there’s no doubt a child being born in Michigan as I speak this sermon to you this morning, it’s who was being born that was significant, and it’s what that child would do that makes it a high point of the Church Year. The Son of God was born, but he had to grow up, it’s why we don’t hear all that much about his upbringing, it’s not why he came, his carpentry skills or knowledge of the Word of God aren’t as significant as His ministry. That’s why for Luke the genealogy of Jesus comes after His Baptism, because His Baptism is the beginning of his work. And that work was for him to be the person that needed to be paid. Our place in the story is one of a hopeless slavery to sin. We are the ones who have indebted ourselves to sin in a hopeless situation due to our corrupt and sinful actions, thoughts, words, and deeds. When Christ comes we are found in chains to sin, and the only way for us to be saved is for a person to take our place and to die to sin. To pay the punishment for our actions, and money and goods won’t do it. A person must take our place. A person must be paid. It’s an unthinkable situation in our own lives, something we would never do. Pay the life of another person? We may see exchanges between countries of prisoners of war, but for someone else to take the place of a convicted person who is facing their own death, a death they deserve due to their own actions? We just don’t see it. It would never happen. And what would we think of the person who would give up a person in this circumstance? A parent who gave up the life of their own beloved child for someone else? A stranger? A criminal? Madness. It’s insane. But again, it’s not some hypothetical situation. It’s not even something that happened to someone else and we are just hearing about it secondhand, this isn’t a story that we may find interesting or horrifying or that we can just be indifferent to. It’s your life. It’s your reality. This is what happened to you.

Jesus is baptized, the means of how the exchange can happen is finished, and the Holy Spirit descends on him in bodily form as a dove, Christ is equipped for His ministry. The journey begins to the cross, and now, the most significant part of it all, the voice comes from heaven and leaves any doubt behind of how God the Father feels about His Son. “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” Fathers and their children can have complicated relationships. Showing emotion can be seen as weakness, and men more often than not keep their emotions and feelings hidden from those around them. You may not have heard your own Father say that he loved you very often, but perhaps he showed his love in other ways. You knew he loved you, because he was always there for you. You knew he loved you because of what he taught you, and what he’d do for you and what he’d sacrifice for you. A father shows his love in that he would never give up the life of his child for someone, he’d give up his own life for his child. But that wasn’t possible, in order to die God had to become man, and that’s why Jesus was born. The child of Bethlehem was born to die, and the Father shows His love for us in sending His Son, in giving His Son up to death, and in forsaking His Son and letting him suffer the punishment of sin, all for you. A person is paid for your sin and that person is the very beloved Son of God. God gives up the one with whom he is well pleased, the one he calls beloved.

Why? Why for you? Would you do the same? Would you give up your beloved for someone like you? A sinner? A rebellious child? Why does he do it? Hear again these words from Isaiah, “Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, **I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life**.” There is no understanding the depth of the love of God, it can’t be fathomed, Christ’s Baptism is a small window into the true meaning of it all but even then it can just bring more questions of why it happened. There’s no explanation beyond the sheer humility that comes from recognizing the love that God has for you. It doesn’t make sense. It’s insane. It’s madness. And yet, it’s your story. It’s your reality. The exchange takes place in your own Baptism because Baptism was instituted by God and because Christ was baptized. The wonderful gifts are given to you. Christ’s perfect life: yours. Christ’s holiness: yours. Your horrible sin: His. Your death sentence: His. You are connected to His work in His ministry through Baptism, and now because he died, as Paul reminds us in Romans chapter 6, you died. “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his……For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.” A person was paid for you, and you have been set free from sin. His Baptism is the first step toward His death because His ministry led to the cross, and if God would sacrifice his beloved Son for you, how much does he love you?

The Father welcomes you, His children to His family, through His Son. Even a child can understand it, and sing it, and remember their own baptisms by looking at a banner or a certificate hanging on a wall. Even a child can make the sign of the cross both upon their forehead or upon their heart to remember when it was made at their Baptism. Even a child can see the Baptismal font and remember their own washing and dying to sin and rebirth through Jesus Christ their Savior. But the thing we don’t think very often when we see the font, or the certificate, or a Baptism banner, or when we sing a Baptism hymn is the very real story that applies to our lives and that we experienced in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, that a person was paid for you. The unthinkable happened for your benefit, the very beloved Son of God came down to Earth and took your place. He gave you all of His good things and took all of your bad, it really happened, and the exchange took place through Baptism. So when you see the font, when you sing the hymns, when you make the sign of the cross, and even when you take a shower or go for a swim, whenever anything reminds you of your Baptism, cherish that memory, meditate upon the crazy and mind boggling love of God for you. A love that would exchange you for His beloved Son and know that no matter what your experience was with your own earthly father. Whether you knew him well, or whether he said that he loved you, or showed that he loved you through his own actions, you can know with certainty, with 100% assuredness that God loves you. You are His beloved because He says it and because of what He’s done for you.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.