

Apology: Last week, I misspoke in suggesting that the magi may have found Jesus in Nazareth. While it is true that Jesus was already a toddler and no longer in the stable manger, the Holy Family remained in the Bethlehem area until the visit of the magi. They fled to Egypt until King Herod died and only then returned to Nazareth. I apologize for the confusion and thank the Bible reader who called me to account for the error.

Grace and peace to all of us from God the Father and his Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

How many of you are parents?

How many of you parents love your children?

How many of you parents raise your children with no rules, boundaries, or discipline?

How many of you are children?

How many of you children love your parents?

How many of you children have experienced no punishment or consequences for behavior that disobeyed your parents?

So, we can conclude that love and discipline go hand in hand.

Timeouts come to an end. Spankings are short-lived. Being grounded doesn't last forever.

We live and learn and love wins out.

Some people say they don't like the Old Testament God because there is a lot of wrath expressed.

And there is – just as parents get angry when kids rebel and fail to do what is asked.

There are serious consequences for God’s people when they fail to take God at his word

and fail to take advantage of the second and third chances he gives to turn things around.

But even those serious consequences – such as illness, disease, destruction and exile – have an end.

And at the end of the appointed time,

God gathers his people from all the corners of the earth and restores them to relationship with him and new purpose in this world.

Isaiah’s words are a message of hope for a people experiencing the consequences of sin and brokenness.

In beautiful images, we hear that **God is with us during the difficult times we face;**

We hear that **redemption is something God does for his people.**

We hear that **nothing can get in the way of God restoring his people.**

We hear that **we are precious and loved by God.**

When we are beset by life’s challenges,

fearing the future, **these words are balm for the soul.**

Imagine now that we are at the Jordan River with all the other religious people.

John is out in the wilderness by the Jordan announcing the promised redemption and calling the people to baptism.

Imagine you are there in the Jordan river.

Imagine the smell of the water and reeds, the mud and warmth of air.

The clamor of people, animals,

voices praying, children singing, babies crying.

The prophet announcing the kingdom of heaven and telling you of the coming redeemer who would gather the useful grain and destroy the useless chaff with fire.

The words of Isaiah ringing in your ears:

2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; ...For I AM the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

It is true. Surely God is in this place and we are not drowned.

See -- Now there is a man with John being baptized and the heavens open and

like a dove the breath of God glides down upon him as a voice from heaven proclaims: *"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."*

He's the one! This is the Messiah John spoke of!

Yes indeed, God is in this place. Something new is beginning.

Jesus' baptism with water and the Holy Spirit is the beginning of God's call to trust in Jesus as the promised redeemer of God's people.

- Jesus is the one who gathers God's people from the ends of the earth and restores them to right relationship.
- Jesus is the one who calls us to baptism in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and
- Jesus is the one who calls us to live as those who obey all that he commands.

Baptism is the relationship in which we live as those who follow Jesus.

The sacrament of Baptism – the public washing and anointing – is the birth of a Christian.

It is the beginning of the lifelong relationship in which Jesus is with us through the waters and fires of life,

forgiving and restoring us to right relationship with our heavenly Father.

Those who come to the church just to “get done” don't grasp the claim God makes on them – a claim that has implications for the entirety of their life.

When we live as though God has no claim on us

- no right to expect our love and obedience
- – no stake in how we spend our time, money, and talents
- – then we are like chaff on the winnowing floor
- – useless.
- Sure we get to do whatever we want with our lives, but for what?

When God calls us to Baptism, we are called to live

- as those who are beloved and precious to God,
- in whom God is well-pleased,
- whose lives are dependent entirely on the power of Jesus' death and resurrection to save us
- and who are visible as living like Jesus

When We are called to baptism,

God chooses us to be people of life and light

- for those who despair,
- who are lost in sin and ignorance,
- and who don't know the difference between happiness and joy.

- So, we form community around a meal,
- and give access to emergency food,
- and provide space for people preparing for citizenship,
- and visit the sick and homebound,
- and pray for one another,
- and care for the vulnerable in our midst,
- because that's how Jesus lives and that's how he commanded us to follow him.

God's restoration of his people through Jesus is not dependent on buildings or denominations or church structures.

It is accomplished entirely through the people he gathers

- to be baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus
- who are nourished by the body and blood of the Savior
- and who are made vital by the Holy Spirit
- to bring hope to the world in word and deed.

With Jesus, You and I are called to a life of baptism

And with him, we are changing the world

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Bonus:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLjkqnaYNoM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBwM57IWp9k>