

Baptism of our Lord
January 10, 2016

Text: Luke 3:15-17, 21, 22

Theme: How Great is This Jesus

1. The Baptist Bears Witness
2. The Spirit Anoints Him
3. The Father Affirms Him

In 1964, after beating Sonny Liston to win his first Heavyweight Boxing Championship, Cassius Clay said, "I am the greatest." That's a point that can be argued again and again in sports. With Kobe Bryant's pending retirement from basketball, the debate is stirred about where he ranks among the sport's greats. When Bo Ryan retired from coaching last month, Dick Vitale pronounced him the greatest coach of all time at Wisconsin. But what does greatness look like? Or to ask it another way, **How Great is this Jesus?**

Much like today, the people of John's day were confused. Here's this strange fellow out on the banks of the Jordan in his camel hair clothes, eating locusts and honey and calling people to repent. And they heard his preparatory message and **were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.** John had just pointed them to Isaiah's prophecy. He had just called them to turn from wickedness given them examples of fruits of repentance and faith.

To their question, John said, **I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.** No one would question whether John was doing great things. People were streaming to him for both the right and the wrong reason and John was serving them all. Jesus himself would later testify about John, **I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John.** But John's testimony says something about Jesus' greatness, for in spite of his own faithfulness and status given to him as the forerunner of the Messiah, he says, **I am unworthy to even untie his sandals.** In other words, John felt inadequate to even be do the duties of his lowest servant. How great is this Jesus? The Baptist bears witness that he is untouchable beyond any person who's ever lived.

It's amazing then, isn't it, that people would today try to usurp Jesus' authority? John proclaimed such harsh law at the hypocrites who came to him not to turn from their wickedness and sin but simply to make a show. The greatness of Jesus is that he holds the power to break down arrogant sinful hearts filled wickedness. He himself came to John as he was baptizing in the Jordan River in order to be baptized, not because he had any sin of his own for which to repent, but to show that as the one who was sent to be the sin-bearer, he might stand in our place and carry our sin.

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. Jesus wasn't alone in this journey. Rather, he was empowered when **The Spirit anoints him.** The First Lesson for today too pointed to that anointing, not to be Savior, but to be King. As such David was set apart for that purpose. Here great David's greater Son is set apart and anointed as the Messiah, his promised descendent. It too was an answer to the people's questions asking whether John might be the Christ – the anointed one.

Here the Spirit placed his seal on Jesus as the one the people were waiting for and looking for. Here he gives his testimony about the greatness of Jesus, who is the fulfillment of every prophecy and the very manifestation of God in the flesh. There could be no doubt that this was the promised Savior. This identification of the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus as the world's Savior. And it's that same Spirit that Jesus sends to anoint us with in our baptism empowering our faith-filled service to him.

As the Spirit descended, the voice from God said, **You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well-pleased.** This third witness gives a powerful testimony about the greatness of this Jesus. First, he is loved by his heavenly Father. That's not that surprising I suppose given that we know one of God's essential attributes is love. But more than that, he says, **with you I am well-pleased.** What pleases God is nothing less than perfect obedience to his commands. That's true of us and it was true of Jesus. Looking at our lives, other words of God would have to echo in our hearts and minds. He says, **I hate all who do wrong.** You and me, the unbeliever and the avowed terrorist all fit that category. But **How Great is this Jesus? The Father Affirms Him.** About Jesus he says, **I am well-pleased.** The thirty-year old Son of God had lived a life of perfect obedience to that point and was perfectly fulfilling the Father's plan of salvation. For that God was pleased.

You and I are pleased with that too because we are the grand beneficiaries of this well-pleasing life that Jesus lived, not just during the 30 years to this point but for the next three and a half years as well all the way to the courtyard of Caiaphas and the praetorium of Pilate, Jesus lived the life he was called to live and fulfilled every commandment of God on your behalf and mine. Now when we receive this sacrament of Holy Baptism, we are connected to his life of holiness. He gives the Holy Spirit and faith to receive the gifts he gives. All our sins are washed away and his righteousness is given to us. Not a single spot of sin committed against our parents, against our brother or sister, against our friends, against our fellow saints here at First whether in public or in private stands to condemn us. Jesus' perfect life of substitution and sacrificial death of atonement are still more evidence of his greatness for they dealt sin, death and Satan the death blow and brought us eternal victory.

Winning a boxing title might be a sign of greatness in sports and make one bold to brag about himself. But the greatness of Jesus is seen in what others said about him. That John sees himself as unable to be his lowest servant. That the Spirit anoints him with power from heaven. That the Father is pleased with his perfect accomplishments. All these not for himself, but you and for me, that he might truly be our Messiah, the one who was anointed to be our Savior. He didn't defeat a human opponent in the boxing ring, but sin and death itself on the battlefield of life so that one day you and I could hoist the belt that reads champion and join him in the victory celebration that will never end proclaiming his greatness for eternity in heaven.