

# Does Baptism Matter?

Matthew 3:13-17  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman  
January 9, 2011

I have some good news and some bad news. Since it's one-and-the-same news, it will all depend on your own personal perspective. A service of worship that includes the Sacrament of Baptism, the Ordination and Installation of Elders, and the Sacrament of The Lord's Supper only leaves enough time for a very short sermon. As I said, some may see this as bad news, but I would suspect that a majority of folks, including myself on this particular Sunday, think that's a wonderful thing.

So I'll cut to the chase. On this Baptism of the Lord Sunday, let me ask you: **Does baptism matter?** Well I suppose that depends on what you believe is the purpose of baptism. For instance, if you were to ask if Presbyterians believe baptism is necessary for salvation, the answer would be "No." It is required, however, for church membership in the Presbyterian denomination. Yet, even with that specific requirement, I'd still answer that baptism matters. And this is why. Of many, many significant points I could mention, I'll share just four this morning.

1. Through our baptism, hopefully we come to understand that was we are indeed a **part of God's family**. That means that each one of us, by the grace of God, has a place in the family of God. And because of that, nobody can tell us that our lives don't matter. Nobody can tell us that we are unloved. Nobody can tell us that we don't belong. We are each other's family, like it or not.

2. Through our baptism, hopefully we come to understand that **we are who God says we are**. And who does God say we are? We are not only children of God, we, like Jesus, are **beloved children of God**. God is saying to you right now, as he did to Jesus in Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism, "You are my child, the beloved, and with you I am well pleased." So I encourage you this morning, even challenge you, to listen for that voice deep within you that calls you "the beloved."

3. Through our baptism, hopefully we come to understand ourselves as being **called by God**. And to what are we called? For one, we are called **to follow the ways of Jesus' teaching**. As disciples, we are especially called to love God, to love our neighbor as ourselves, and even to love our enemies.

We are also called, each one of us, to **a life of service to others – to carry out the ministries begun by Jesus**. It is through our baptism, and the recognition of God's indwelling Spirit within each one of us, that we are **commissioned and empowered** to carry on these ministries of compassion, peace and justice. For when we become aware of our own chosenness, our eyes are open to the chosenness of others. There is a unique, special place and role for every one of us in furthering the realm of God in the

here and now. I believe that there is a specific need that can be filled based on your specific God-given gifts of time, talents, and resources.

It is this third point, being called by God, which also applies in a special way to those called to serve in leadership positions in the church. It is this particular calling to church leadership that is specifically recognized in the **Ordination and Installation of Elders** to serve on the Session, which we will do this morning following this sermon.

4. Through our baptism, hopefully we come to understand the need to **fulfill the vow that each person in the congregation has taken to help raise and nurture each person being baptized in the Christian faith** – just as we vowed to do in Maise's baptism this morning. There are few things as important as a congregation's role to nurture all its members in the Christian faith.

I'll close with what I think is a wonderful summary of why Baptism matters. It's found in the words of a 1977 document adopted by the Presbyterian Church called **A Declaration of Faith**, sections of which I often use as part of our weekly Affirmation of Faith.

*By humble submission to John's baptism, Christ joined himself to all people in their need, and entered upon his ministry of reconciliation in the power of the Spirit. Christian baptism marks the receiving of the same Spirit by all God's people. By baptism, individuals are publicly received into the church to share in its life and ministry, and the church becomes responsible for their training and support in Christian discipleship.*

Again, of the many things that can be said about why baptism matters,

1. We are part of the family of God.
2. We are beloved children of God.
3. We are called by God to serve and to further the realm of God.
4. We are to nurture one another in the Christian faith, and in life itself.

My friends, believe the good news, you are indeed chosen, called, empowered, and beloved by God.

Amen.