



# Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

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SERMON – BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

LUKE 3:15-17, 21-22

JANUARY 9, 2022

“BY REQUEST...A BAPTISMAL HYMN”

A few years ago, I attended a performance of the “Grand Old Opry” in Nashville. Everyone in the “ol oprey house” that night was eager to hear to all the performers, but we knew the big name acts would be near the conclusion. That night the last on stage was a group called “*Old Crow Medicine Show*”, and one of their biggest hits was a song called “Wagon Wheel.” When they came out, they sang a couple of their recent songs, then did a tribute to the great country singer Glen Campbell, who’d died earlier that week. It was all good, but I began worry when the radio host came on stage we assumed, to end of the show.

Instead, he asked the lead singer if they had another song...he paused a bit then quoted country music legend Roy Acuff, who once drawled “*remember, when you get on stage, sing em what got you up there in the first place!*” And they started in on “Wagon Wheel” and the place just erupted...each chorus sung louder and louder by the audience. The applause was loud and long. Mr. Acuff was right...audiences want you to sing songs they know and love. New numbers now and then never hurt but folks come for the hits they can enthusiastically join in on.

The story of the baptism of our Lord is one of expectations. Luke tells us “*All the people were waiting expectantly and wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.*” NO, he thundered. I’m the opening act. I’m barely worthy to introduce Him. And then John says what the one coming will do... baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire...separate the chaff of this world from the wheat and then burn it - forever removing it from the world. Enormous claims, heightened expectations – a crowd on edge! Jesus was the real deal.

Luke confirms Jesus was “the real deal” by relaying the introduction Jesus gets from heaven – “*you are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*” But something seems oddly out of place ...why, before he begins his Messianic performance was Jesus himself baptized. Why did his “introduction” come only after his baptism? Luke is silent on the reaction of John to his task, but Matthew says John was horrified and tried to prevent it. This was not on the program. This was a new song - not winnowing fork stuff, picking the bad out of the world and leaving only the good. That’s what everyone came to hear. Isaiah the prophet foretold of a Savior who would seize governments, “*putting them upon his shoulder*” – this was the song Israel was just bursting with anticipation to sing.

Jesus comes instead and immediately identifies himself with the chaff – you might even say as chaff - sharing the penitential mood of most of the people who’d come to the Jordan. He didn’t identify himself as all-powerful Messiah who would scoop up governments, quash evil and set folks straight, but with people who were beset by evil, subjected to it daily and themselves often responsible for it. The baptism of Jesus was the opening line of a new song – one that was neither popular nor easy to learn.

The governance of Jesus was and is personal. He displaced no rulers. No armies surrendered to him or were disbanded in his name. Harlots were encountered but their trade not abolished...lepers and the blind healed but disease by no means eradicated...forceful lessons on the allure and dangers of wealth given but bank accounts or lands were never demanded or seized. He spoke with power and authority we are told

but his followers were outnumbered by detractors and the indifferent by a wide margin. He presented himself in one parable as no more than a farmer who scattered seed and saw  $\frac{3}{4}$  of it produce nothing.

Jesus sang a new song, or rather “songs” composed entirely with each person he encountered in mind. John gave a prelude to this. As people were being baptized, they asked “what must I do” - a detail unique to Luke’s telling of the baptism of our Lord – intended to take the story beyond the baptism of Jesus and make it about ours. To anyone with two tunics, John said share one. To a tax collector he said be honest in a trade rife with opportunity for corruption. To a soldier, he said don’t abuse your power...guard, don’t oppress.

You get the idea - all intended to make us examine what baptism means. It should mean something. Our Lutheran tradition is clear baptism is about what God does for us, ...in baptism our gracious heavenly Father liberates us from sin and death...born children of sin, we are re-born inheritors of eternal life. And then we are introduced, brought on stage...made members of the church. John said repent...and his followers said, “tell us what to do.” Jesus has told you to repent. What should you do?

As you think about that – think above all about what Jesus did. *“This is my son, with whom I am well pleased”* was spoken not simply or even chiefly because Jesus was baptized, but that he quite literally identified himself, who knew no sin, as a sinner. In his baptism Jesus began to do what his Father said “he must do” – go the cross. The first government Jesus put on his shoulders was his Father’s kingdom and its judgement of sin. The old familiar songs we love to sing come with titles like “Jesus Friend of Sinners” and “Blessed Assurance Jesus is Mine.”

So, he is. Your Lord’s love authored those songs. But when Paul in Romans 6 said *“just as Jesus was raised from the dead by the glory of the father, we too might live a new life”* he was talking to you about YOUR baptism as forcefully as John did about his. What must you do? A good way to answer that is to ask, what do I have? Tunics or food to share – themselves the means to protect folks who lack them? Can you a soldier of the Lord be a reconciler and forgiver as your commanding officer was, and not an accuser or criticizer?

But better still, remember what you have is Christ – the creator of this world and the life you enjoy in it, the forgiver of your craving to enjoy it as you will rather than He wills, and the spirit who will one day change your mortal body into a heavenly one, and can surely change how you live today. What you have is a beautiful baptismal hymn to sing...and the applause of heaven as you do is loud and long. AMEN