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The Baptism of Christ with Special Reference to the Gift of the Spirit

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I

WHILE John the Baptist, in the country beyond Jordan near Bethany (or Bethabara), was performing his office of preparing the way for the Messiah by his preaching and baptizing unto repentance for the remission of sins, and while all the people, from all directions and all walks of life, came to John to hear him and receive his baptism, Jesus also came from Nazareth (Mark) out of Galilee (Matt.). Since His twelfth year nothing had been recorded of Him except that He grew up in Nazareth. Now, after eighteen years of silence and obscurity, when He was about 30 years old (Luke), He emerged into public view. He came to John to be baptized by him. John demurred (Matt.). Though he did not fully know Jesus as the Messiah (John), yet he felt his unworthiness in the presence of Jesus and thought their positions should be reversed. But Jesus insisted that for now (ἄρτι, Matt.) it was the proper thing to do, as far as both of them (ἡμῶν) were concerned. Both had a job to do: John, to baptize everyone; and Jesus, to accept his baptism, "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt.). John raised no further objections. It is nowhere stated whether any other people were present at this time, though this would be most probable. John took Jesus down to the water and baptized Him. Nothing is said of the mode of baptism.

Immediately after the baptism, as Jesus came up and away from the water and was in the act of prayer (Luke), a most remarkable (Matt.: ἰδού) event occurred, of which at least John

(John 1) and Jesus were aware, possibly also the crowd (Luke). The heavens (plur., Matt. and Mark; sing., Luke and John) were opened (Matt., Luke) or torn (Mark: σχιζομένους), and the Holy Spirit, seen by both Jesus (Matt., Mark) and John (John), descended out of the opened heaven and came on Jesus (Matt., Mark, Luke) and remained on Him (John). The invisible Spirit revealed His coming and presence in the form (Luke) of a dove, serving as a divinely announced signal to John the Baptist that this was indeed the Messiah, and John so testified (John 1). Either simultaneously with, or immediately after, the descent of the Holy Spirit, there came a voice from heaven which said, either in direct address to Jesus: "Thou art My Son, the Beloved, in Thee I took delight" (Luke and Mark), or in indirect reference to Jesus: "This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I took delight" (Matt.).

This is, in brief outline, the account of this unique event as combined from the record of all four evangelists. A few observations: All four report the Baptism and the dovelike descent of the Spirit. All but John tell of the voice from heaven. In Mark and Luke the words are addressed to Christ. Matthew uses the third person. Matthew alone mentions the conversation between Jesus and John, while Luke alone refers to Christ as praying in connection with the Spirit's descent. Peculiar to Mark and characteristic of his vividness of detail is the mention of Nazareth as the point of departure for Jesus as well as the mention of the fact that Jesus saw the heavens torn. The Fourth Gospel alone records that the descent of the Spirit was of special significance for John, a sign given him, by the One who had sent him to baptize, by means of which he should recognize beyond a doubt Him whose way he was preparing. On the basis of this identification John was prepared to point to Jesus and give positive testimony concerning His Messiahship.

In addition to the references to this incident in the Four Gospels, there are at least two others to which we should call attention. When St. Peter came to the house of the Roman centurion Cornelius in Caesarea, he preached the basic facts concerning the earthly career of our Lord. In the summary of the sermon as reported by St. Luke in Acts 10, most New Testament scholars

see an excellent example of the content of the apostolic kerygma, both as to individual features and as to its scope, indicating the *termini* within which the Christian Gospel was proclaimed. It is significant that this proclamation, so far as it concerns the life of Christ, begins with the words, "You know the Word which He sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all), the Word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power" (RSV). Then follows, in order, the public ministry of Jesus, His death on the cross, His resurrection and great commission, and reference to His return to Judgment. This indicates that the kerygma proceeded in the light of the gift of the Spirit.

The other text is Acts 1:21 ff., where the qualifications of the man who was to be chosen to take the place of Judas Iscariot in the ranks of the twelve apostles are given: "So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when He was taken up from us — one of these men must become with us a witness of the resurrection" (RSV). It seems clear from these references that the event at the Jordan when Jesus was baptized formed the starting point of apostolic preaching, as the decisive turning point in His career. It appears, too, that very little was made of the birth, infancy, childhood, and the years of obscurity in Nazareth, or they were passed over entirely, as in Mark's and John's Gospels. Note how St. Mark starts out: "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Thereupon the evangelist plunges headlong into a compressed summary of John's ministry and already in v. 9 he tells of Christ's baptism. These facts are worth remembering, as we shall now see, in a discussion of the significance of that event together with its accompanying circumstances.

II

A. The baptism of Jesus was, first of all, of great significance for John the Baptist. Here stood this gaunt and solemn man, a man apart from the crowd, dedicated to a very special mission

and service of God from his mother's womb, a man of unimpeachable moral earnestness and incomparable courage, a powerful protest by word and manner of life against all the traditional and comfortable, indifferent and shallow ideas of true righteousness, the stern and inflexible preacher of repentance to all alike. "Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance," thundered John.

None greater born of woman had ever appeared on the scene. He was a prophet, yea, more than a prophet. The popular fancy was intrigued with the notion that was articulated in the question: "Is not this the Messiah?" In the midst of his sensational activity there appeared before him one day the simple, yet somehow imposing figure of a carpenter from the backwoods of Nazareth, Jesus by name. He requested John to baptize Him also. And though by his own testimony John did not yet know Jesus, that is, did not fully know by a divinely wrought certainty that Jesus was the Messiah, yet there was that about this humbly pleading man that overpowered and humbled John. Here was no call to repentance as otherwise, but "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and Thou comest to me?" In the presence of Jesus John is keenly conscious of his own unworthiness, his sinfulness, and his own need of forgiveness. John realized his divinely bestowed mission of doing all his work as forerunner *for* the Messiah, which in his view did not include performing his specific task *on* the Messiah. John felt that their positions ought to be reversed. Yet Jesus included John when He said, "It is proper for us [ἡμῖν, both of us] to fulfill all righteousness."

Of even greater significance was the baptism of Jesus for Jesus Himself. John was certainly correct in suggesting that he needed baptism more than Jesus, that, in fact, Jesus did not need it at all. John's baptism involved repentance and remission of sins. How could either of these have any relevance for Jesus?

Surely, here was one person who stood in no need whatever of a μετάνοια, a change of heart or mind, or direction of will, nor of a baptism that bestowed the gift of divine forgiveness. The whole Christian theology rests on the fact of our Lord's personal perfection and stainless sinlessness. The Child born of Mary was "that Holy Thing." In purity and holiness He grew

to manhood. Even here at His baptism He is given the complete approval of His heavenly Father. As the eternal God His very essence is holiness. This is true also of the human nature which He assumed and to which He communicated His perfection.

But, then, why should He be baptized? He Himself gives the answer: "Suffer it to be so *now* [ἄρτι]; for *thus* [οὕτως] it becometh us to fulfill *all* righteousness [πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην]." What Jesus is saying appears to amount to this: John, I do not dispute the truth of your assertion. I am not in need of baptism for Myself; you are right also in your feeling of inferiority. Ordinarily we should be exchanging places. But *now*, in this present circumstance, your baptism, which God commanded you to bestow on all the people, must be applied to Me. Both of us have a mission to perform; yours, to prepare the way for the Messiah; Mine, to be the Messiah. Therefore you must do your job in baptizing Me, and I must do Mine by being baptized. "Permit *now*, for *in this way* it is the right, the fitting thing [πρέπον] for us to fulfill all righteousness."

We must remember that, especially in the prophecies of Isaiah, the Messiah is pictured as the Servant of Jehovah (Is. 42:1; 52:13; 53:11. See also Zech. 3:8; 6:12, 13). This implies a conscious and complete submission. The Father sent forth His Son (Gal. 4:4, ἐξαπέστειλεν, like an apostle) on a specific mission. And the Son, in complete harmony of purpose with the Father, accepted the assignment (Hymn 142:3: "Yea, Father, yea, most willingly, I'll do what Thou commandest; My will conforms to Thy decree, I do what Thou demandest"). All the facts of the incarnation and humiliation are involved with this mission and total submission. The first recorded utterance of Jesus, as a 12-year-old, gives expression to this truth, "Don't you know that I must be in My Father's business" (ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου δεῖ εἶναί με)? In the Messianic 40th Psalm (v. 8) the Messiah is quoted as saying, "I delight to do Thy will, O My God," and in Hebrews 10 this is applied directly to Christ. He Himself lived and labored in constant, full awareness of the Father's will. "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34); "I seek not My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (5:30); "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will,

but the will of Him who sent Me" (6:38). A divine "must" (δεῖ) was upon Him: "I must work the works of Him who sent Me" (John 9:14); "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (John 3:14). With eyes directed toward His Passion, "Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things" (Matt. 16:21). In the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed, "Not My will, but Thine, be done."

All of this is of a piece with Christ's assertion at His baptism, "So it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness." All that our incarnate Lord did was an act of total obedience to the Father's will. So Christ made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and humbled Himself, and became obedient, yea, obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Christ's submission to John's baptism meant for Him, therefore, the performance of a necessary part of His redemptive work, a part of His active obedience, which included the dutiful submission to all that God asked of man.¹ "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28).²

¹ In the words "obedience" and "submission" is expressed the double aspect of our Lord's total obedience. All of it was "active" in the sense of a conscious, willing performance of the duties the Father gave Him; all of it was "passive" in the sense of the meek, nonresisting surrender of the Son to the Father's direction. I am aware of the fact that this use of the terms involves some shift in meaning. The church intends these terms to convey the thought of Christ's perfect obedience both in what He did and in what was done to Him. "Passive" harks back to the *passus* of the Creed in the sense of suffering. Perhaps the German *tätig* and *leidend* approach the idea a little more closely. The word "passive" nowadays sometimes connotes the German *willenlos* which may, of course, never be asserted of Jesus. In any event it is perilous to attempt segregation or isolation of any phase of our Lord's redemptive activity. On total obedience cf. Formula of Concord, S. D. III, 15.

² Luther: "Christ says: For the sake of all sinners I have become a sinner and must therefore do everything God has imposed on sinners, so that they may be made righteous through Me" (St. Louis ed., XIII a, 136). "Though Jesus had the authority to baptize, He did not avail Himself of this power, but conducts Himself like others and submits to John's baptism. How simple and unpretentious His bearing! Who would have taken Him for the Messiah?" "Being greater than John, He might have said: 'You must not baptize Me. It is My office to baptize you.' But He does nothing of the kind. Rather He conceals Himself, acts as though He were not Christ, and gives no inkling of that fact. This is indeed a remarkable humility. He does not have Himself proclaimed, He does not glorify Himself, but lets the Father glorify Him."

So, then, the baptism of Jesus concerns us most of all. For Himself He had no need of repentance, of forgiveness, or of fulfilling all righteousness. It was a vicarious deed, an act of substitution for all of us sinners who lack that righteousness, who desperately need repentance and forgiveness.³

B. Connected with our Lord's baptism is also the descent of the Holy Spirit. This, too, is of the utmost significance and importance for John the Baptist, for Christ Himself, and for us.

The descent of the Spirit was extremely important for the ministry of John the Baptist. It was his singular assignment to prepare the way of the Lord, not pointing forward to the distant future, as did Old Testament prophets, but directing the people of Israel to One who was already among them. The first part of this preparation was to level the highway for the approaching Messiah's entry into men's hearts, by the preaching of repentance. But this was only one side of John's work. He was, above all, to turn the hearts of the people to faith in the Messiah.⁴ To do this, John must himself know and be able positively to identify the Messiah in their midst. Now, if we had only the account of the Synoptics, especially that of Matthew, it would seem that John already possessed this vital knowledge. But when we read John's Gospel, we find these words of John the Baptist: "I myself did not know Him, but that He might be revealed to Israel, therefore came I baptizing with water." And John testified, saying: "I saw

"Though Christ was the Son of God and had all things in His power, He did not undertake to preach without being called thereto. He awaits the command of the Father and does not come before the public until He hears the Father say: 'This is My beloved Son.'" These quotations and others still to follow are from Luther's sermon in the *Kirchenpostille*, St. Louis ed., XI, 2129 ff. The translations are my own.

³ Cf. Adolf Schlatter, *Matthäuskommentar*, p. 89: "Christ's baptism was an act of love. He joins the sinners and takes His place among the guilty, not to seek deliverance for Himself, not to attempt escape from the coming wrath because of His own guiltiness, but because He is one with them." See also J. T. Mueller, *Zur Bedeutung der Taufe Jesu*, CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, VI, 2. According to him, Christ's baptism represents *die Bestätigung und Salbung des Heilandes* which signalizes *seine offizielle Ausrüstung für sein Amtswerk*. "Nicht für sich, für seine Person, wurde Jesus mit dem heiligen Geisten und Kraft gesalbt, sondern als unser Mittler und Erlöser, der durch seinen ganzen tätigen und leidenden Gehorsam die Welt mit Gott versöhnen sollte."

⁴ Cf. the poetic summation of the Baptist's work in the imperishable Benedictus intoned by his father, Luke 1:76-79: "And thou, child, shalt be

the Spirit descending like a dove out of heaven, and He remained on Him. And I myself did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water, that One said to me, 'On whom you shall see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, He is the One baptizing with the Holy Spirit.' And I saw and I testified that He is the Son of God." Thus the witness of the Spirit's descent on Christ was decisive for John. Henceforth he could and did point to Jesus and say: "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world," directing his hearers away from himself, sending his disciples to Jesus. "He must increase, I must decrease."

What the gift of the Spirit signified for Christ Himself is beyond full calculation. In order to arrive at a true evaluation, we shall do well, first, to eliminate some false notions. It has been said that here was the beginning of Christ's Messianic consciousness; that the gift of the Spirit was the moment when the Logos took possession of the man Jesus and stayed with Him until His death on the cross; that the unipersonal God endowed the mere man Jesus with certain temporary powers, according to the teaching of dynamic Monarchianism; that, in short, by the descent of the Spirit something was given to Christ that He did not have before.⁵

All of these interpretations, in one way or another, conflict with the Scripture doctrine of the Holy Trinity and of the essential deity of our Lord Jesus. They destroy the truth of the indivisible unity of God and also introduce an idea of inequality among the three Persons of the one divine Essence. They involve themselves in the pitfalls of tritheism or subordinationism. Both the doctrine of the Trinity and of the Godhead of Christ are presented in unmistakable terms in the Word of God. They are also emphasized in the church's confessions, as, for instance, in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. If, then, it is true that Jesus is the eternal Son of God,

called the prophet of the Most High; for thou shalt go before the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (RSV).

⁵ Schlatter: "The coming of the Spirit did not *make* Christ the Son of God. It revealed what He was already. It was the divine signal, for which He had waited, to begin His work." (*Die Geschichte des Christus*, p. 90.)

very God of very God, coequal with the Father and the Spirit in infinite majesty and power, if Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and if the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily, nothing should be asserted that would deny these truths. When the Scriptures do speak, as Jesus Himself does, of a kind of inferiority of the Son (John 14:28), or of something being given to Him, this must always be understood of Him according to His human nature, and hence, connected with the purpose of His incarnation and humiliation, namely, our redemption, and must, therefore, be seen in its soteriological setting.

We shall set it down as our thesis that the descent of the Spirit at the baptism of Jesus signified the public declaration from the Father that now His Messianic work in His threefold office was to begin. Let us unfold this statement.

We point first to a major emphasis concerning the Messiah expressed in Old Testament prophecy. Ps. 45:7: "You love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your fellows" (RSV). This passage is quoted in Heb. 1:8, 9, introduced by the words, "But of the Son He says." Is. 11:1, 2: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom" (RSV). Is. 42:1: "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; My Chosen, in whom My soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon Him" (RSV). Matt. 12:18-21 points to Christ for the fulfillment of this prophecy. Finally, Is. 61:1, 2: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to bring good tidings to the afflicted" (RSV). This prophecy is used by our Lord Himself more than once in support of His own Messianic claims.

It is clear from these texts that an intimate, inseparable connection is established between the Holy Spirit and the Messianic activity of Jesus. The coming of the Holy Spirit is repeatedly pictured as an anointing. From this derives the Hebrew מָשַׁח , of which Χριστός is simply the Greek translation. That is to say, Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, precisely because of the unction of the Holy Spirit. If we may put it thus, the total redemptive career of our Lord is under the sign of the Holy Spirit. His very

incarnation was the result of the Spirit's activity. Luke 1:35: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." Matt. 10:18: "Mary was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit" (cf. v. 20).

In a mysterious way, in a sense beyond our comprehension, according to the plan of the Triune God for our salvation, the Holy Spirit was in charge of the redemptive work of the incarnate Son; He operated the Messianic timetable, so to speak. Therefore now, in fulfillment of prophecy and as an act of solemn inauguration and the bestowal of the full equipment for the saving program of our Lord, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and remained upon Him.

Now the long years of obscurity and quiet waiting for the signal to begin the public office were over. The Son, who made Himself the Servant of Jehovah and would take no step without the Father's sanction, now received that sanction by means of the Spirit's unction and the voice from heaven so closely connected with it. The events immediately following Christ's Baptism and the descent of the Spirit show that the discharge of His Messianic office is the result of the Spirit's anointing. All three Synoptics emphasize this truth. Matt. 4:1: "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." Mark 1:12: "And immediately the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness." More fully Luke 4:1: "Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness." Luke goes even further. At the close of his account of the temptation he continues: "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee," and he begins his account of our Lord's ministry with His sermon in the synagog of Nazareth. The text is one of the great Messianic prophecies of Isaiah (61:1 ff.), in which the Spirit plays so prominent a role. Having read the text, Jesus makes the electrifying statement: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (RSV).

It is clear, then, that, on the one hand, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus did not give Him anything that as true God He did not possess fully before, that He did not become what He was not already, but that, on the other hand, according to His human nature and in His role as the Servant of Jehovah, He lived

and acted in total submission to the Father's will and performed His Messianic functions under the Father's direction. The descent of the Spirit was the Father's way of signaling for the Son the fact that now the time had come to enter on His public redemptive work and that the unction with the Spirit "without measure" endowed Him, according to His servant status, with the full resources of the divine power.⁶

Again, we cannot divorce any action of Christ's, or any act performed with relation to Him, from the consideration that all is tied together with the purpose of His incarnation, namely, to be our Savior. Everything that concerns Christ, the whole Christ, the God-man, also directly concerns us. Thus also the coming of the Holy Spirit on Christ is of the greatest significance for us. The soteriological aspects are paramount.

By the anointing with the Spirit from above Jesus began in very truth to be the Christ, as Luther points out.⁷ But this fact at once points to the heavy emphasis on the Spirit's place in the Messiah's (the Anointed One's) office in Old Testament prophecy. If now these promises are literally fulfilled in the Spirit's descent on Jesus,

⁶ Schlatter: "It had for Christ the inexhaustible importance of a divine declaration by means of which the Father showed Him His will, so that the event determined with causal force His entire history" (p. 92).

Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Eisenach Gospel Selections*, 2d ed., carefully revised. Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1916: "The chief thing in this text is the assumption by Jesus of His high and holy office and work as the Savior of the world and His wonderful anointing with the Spirit in preparation for His work" (p. 209).

R. R. Caemmerer, *CTM*, XVII, 12: "In this event God the Father gave to His Son as the Redeemer of the world the Spirit of God in a very special sense. He equipped Him with His Spirit for the purpose of His ministry."

⁷ "This is the beginning of the New Testament. Although Christ was born as a child, He did not yet begin His office. Nor did He presume to do so until He was called thereto by the Father. In sum, with the Baptism the office begins; here He becomes our Christ, our Savior; for this purpose He had come, as Isaiah says, chapter 61, which Christ applies to Himself." — "But why should Luke in Acts and Mark in his Gospel begin with the ministry of John and the Baptism of Jesus? Here Christ begins to be Christ. Here He is inaugurated and enters His office. And the Father Himself confirmed Him in it in order to give the world certainty, so that it might have no doubt concerning Christ." — "Christ is full of the Spirit, yet He speaks no word and does no deed unless He be first glorified by the Father. He does not wish to assume His office on His own, but by authority of another, the Father. Only then does He undertake His work, perform His office, do miracles." — "At His Baptism and the descent of the Spirit Christ becomes a different man, not as regards His person but as regards His office."

we are powerfully reminded of the faithfulness of God. Every mention of Christ, the official title of the Redeemer, must bring the faithfulness of God to our attention. The truth of God's entire dealings with us men is sealed by the Spirit's coming. It certifies to us that God is in earnest about our welfare, that His grace, His unmerited kindness to fallen mankind, is serious, that His plan of our deliverance and restoration to fellowship with Him through Christ is utterly reliable. God's performance is fully commensurate with His promise.

Without the Spirit's anointing, Jesus would not be the Christ, our Christ, who repelled Satan's onslaughts, fulfilled all righteousness, performed His prophetic ministry in His revelation of God to us, His high-priestly function in the perfect sacrifice for sin and ceaseless intercession for sinners, and rules over all as king and head of the church until its final consummation in glory. Jesus the Christ did all things necessary for our salvation in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that our Lord, in turn, could make His oft-repeated promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit to His disciples a vibrant reality. Even now, in the exaltation of our Lord to the heavenly throne, the Spirit is His redemptive agent on earth, as the entire Book of Acts and the Epistles testify.

C. A final feature of Christ's baptism is the voice from heaven declaring: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I took delight."⁸ Thus the voice of the Father completes this most remarkable

⁸ Εὐδόκησα. This aorist would seem to imply more than present approval. The first part of the Father's statement is obviously related to the solemn decree recorded in Psalm 2: "Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee." This is the Father's answer to those who rebel "against the Lord and against His Anointed." The strong terms of approval, εὐδόκησα and ἀγαπητός, echo the declaration in Is. 42:1, where the corresponding terms are "Mine Elect" and "My soul delighteth." The parallel suggests that εὐδόκησα is a pregnant term, implying deliberate choice in the past (cf. 1 Peter 1:20, "who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world but was manifest in these last times for you"). The effects and results of this eternal choice carry over into all the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament and are brought to incipient fruition at the Baptism. Highly significant is the fact that in his account of the transfiguration St. Luke substitutes the word ἐκλελεγμένος for the ἀγαπητός of the other Synoptics (Luke 9:35), though the KJV translates both with "beloved." The fact that in Is. 42:1 the Father's choice and approval, the Son's servant status, as well as the bestowal of the Spirit, are all united in one great Messianic prophecy demonstrates the interrelation and interdependence of all details of our Lord's Baptism.

demonstration of the Holy Trinity. These words of the Father concerning Jesus do not mean, of course, that right here Jesus became the Son of God. He was and is that from all eternity. Nor do they signify merely that the Father designates the Son in a general way as the object of His love and approval. The Father's declaration is given specific significance by the context. By His words the Father is, in effect, saying: "I am in complete harmony with, and I express publicly my full approval of, what has just transpired and of what this implies." The Son appears in the form of a servant and humbly submits to John's baptism of repentance and remission "to fulfill all righteousness" as the sinners' substitute — "this is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The Son awaits the signal for beginning His Messianic mission in total obedience to the Father's direction ("I delight to do Thy will"); and the Father testifies, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Henceforth the Son, by the Spirit's measureless unction, carries forward to glorious fruition the whole redeeming program through life and death, resurrection and ascension, governance and judgment, the preaching of the Gospel and the preservation of the Church — and the Father declares, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Can there be greater comfort for us than this, that the full divine approval rests on all that Christ did for us? Can there be sounder certainty for us of our salvation than this assurance? Can there be a more solemn reminder of the fact that apart from Christ there is no other redemption than that the Father declares the Son to be the object of His love and favor? If we are not "in Christ," we do not enjoy the divine approbation.⁹

⁹ I cannot refrain from adding a few more quotations from Luther's sermon to show the sublimely consoling and truly practical applications he makes: "Truly, this is a great and precious grace and mercy of God, that thus the divine Majesty condescends to give us certainty concerning Christ. To this end God Himself intervenes and binds us to the Person of Christ Himself, yea, He tops it all by giving us a higher witness from heaven. He not only has Christ pointed out by a man, but God Himself does so by His Spirit, and confirms and seals it all with His word from heaven, 'This is My beloved Son.'" — "Whoever desires to come to the Father must cling to the beloved Son, must sit on His back, must leap on His lap." — "The Father's word brings us to a true knowledge of Christ. How so? By telling us that He is God's Son and well pleasing to His Father. By these words God brings laughter and rejoicing to all hearts and saturates all creation with pure divine sweetness and

Surely this is of vital significance not only to each individual Christian in his entire life of faith and love but also to the church in her entire structure, life, work, and kerygma. The church acknowledges all the tremendous truths of all of God's condescension to us in her great Trinitarian doxology:

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow . . .
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

St. Louis, Mo.

consolation. For if I know this for sure, that the man Christ is the Son of God and well pleasing to His Father (and how dare I doubt it, since the divine Majesty Himself, who cannot lie, so states from heaven?), then I am also certain that everything this man says and does is the word and work of the beloved Son which is bound to please God." — "How could God pour Himself out more fully or present Himself more lovingly and sweetly than by declaring that it is His heart's delight to see the Son speak so gently to me, be so devoted to me, and with such great love suffer and die for me?" — "Could we but appreciate this truth, we should doubtless see heaven and earth aflame with divine love, with life and righteousness, honor and praise; on the other hand, hell with its fire, with death and sin, would seem nothing more than a painted picture."