

JJ¹

Celebrating birthdays is one of the things we most love to do. Children squirm in anticipation. And ladies, while you might not like celebrating your birthday so much as you get older, the rest of us love to celebrate having you with us in this world and in our lives. I even know that some men will send their mother-in-law flowers on their wife's birthday.

We easily remember our birthdays, the day we were born into our earthly families. But friends, do you celebrate the day you were made **CHILDREN OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER?** Do you remember the date of your baptism? Now, knowing the exact date isn't as important as knowing that you are a baptized child of God, but it would be good to remember that date as well. To celebrate our own baptisms and what it means for us, we look to the day when Jesus was baptized. A beautiful day to celebrate indeed—not because Jesus needed baptism like you and I do, but because it marks the day Jesus began his public ministry which would eventually lead him to a cross, all so that he could make you and me **CHILDREN OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER.**

In the first half of our Gospel, we hear how John the Baptizer came preparing the way for Jesus. He called people to repentance, baptizing them for the forgiveness of their sins. But he also

displayed great humility—both in what he wore and ate, and more importantly in his attitude. People thought maybe he was the promised Messiah because of this great spiritual revival that was being brought about through him. To squash those ideas John preached: “One more powerful than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals! I baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Now, it's important for us to understand that John isn't talking about two different baptisms. Look in Scripture and you will find that both give the same thing. John isn't contrasting the baptisms, but the person administering the baptism. John is telling us that he's just an instrument God uses to bring other people into God's family, just as he uses ministers today. John is saying that Jesus is the one who can actually give someone the gift of faith through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then surprisingly, one day the Son of God, the giver of the Holy Spirit, comes to John to be baptized! Jesus' baptism began in a rather unspectacular way. Just like any of the other baptisms John had done before, Jesus and John entered the Jordan River. John baptized him. But as they were coming out is when the extraordinary happens. Like at his birth,

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for “Jesus Help”. It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

heaven is ripped open, but instead of an angel appearing to shepherds, the Holy Spirit pours through the opening descending on Jesus like a dove. Then God the Father speaks, "You are my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with you."

Here at Jesus' baptism we see the Holy Trinity. God the Father who spoke all of creation into existence, speaks here. God the Holy Spirit who hovered over the surface of the deep, now descends upon our Lord Jesus who stands at the very center of it all. He is God the Son, and his heavenly Father anoints him with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' baptism is a beautiful and amazing event. It proves to us beyond a doubt that Jesus is the promised Savior, and now it's time to really begin his work. Yet, at the same time, Jesus' baptism shows us in overwhelming ways how lacking we are when it comes to family relationships—both earthly and heavenly.

In God, we see a perfect loving relationship between the three persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And this holy God demands certain things of you and me regarding our earthly families. Children: honor, serve and obey your parents. Husbands: serve

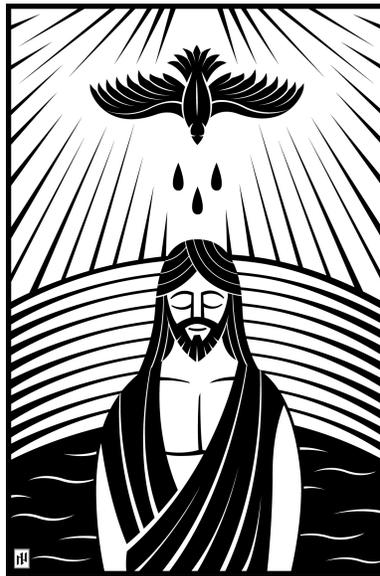
and love your wives, just as Christ loves the Church. Wives: respect and submit to your husbands, as the Church submits to Christ. Brothers and sisters: love one another. The list of commands of how we are to treat one another in the family can go on and on.

Sadly, these God-pleasing relationships within the family are all too often terribly lacking or even absent. Children, you regularly disobey your parents. And even

when you do what they say you still dishonor them as you do it with a grumbling heart. Husbands and wives, you fail miserably as you have a me-first attitude, "Well, what about me? What about what I want?" You fail as you long for someone else's spouse, or desire that your spouse would be someone they are not. Brothers and sisters, you fail when you fight over the inheritance.

You fail when you fall into the petty vindictiveness of shunning, ignoring and passive-aggressive behavior when one of your siblings has hurt you, whether intentional or not. And the failure is multiplied when you return the favor.

We could be here all day talking about the family problems you and I create. But all these are symptoms of something far worse—a strained and frayed



relationship with God. When you boil it all down, God really only gives you one command in regards to himself. He says, "You shall have no other gods." Sounds simple, but it's the most impossible task for this sinful human flesh. At best, you don't trust that God is indeed your perfect and ever-loving heavenly Father, and you prove this when you doubt he'll take care of you, rescue you, or simply give you what you need. And at worst, you worship at the altar of false gods—work, money, popularity, sex, entertainment, etc. Realize friends, that when these become your pursuits of happiness and pleasure, you are an unfaithful bride committing spiritual adultery against your divine and heavenly Bridegroom!

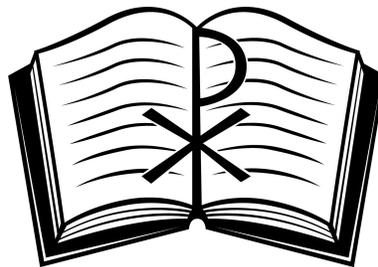
When it comes to family relations, earthly and heavenly, you fail miserably! Yet, we turn to Jesus' baptism today, not just to see how you fail where he was perfect. No, we turn to Jesus' baptism both to see the perfect family relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to see what this perfect family has accomplished. All their work is to make you CHILDREN OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER.

This is exactly what God has done for you at your baptism. You were born into an earthly family that passed on the worst family trait there is—a sinful nature. But in your baptism, you were

born into a new family—a heavenly and eternal family and given a new heart. There at your baptism, your sinful nature was taken out of the driver's seat and replaced with a new self. At your baptism, you were made CHILDREN OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER. At your baptism, Jesus became your eternal Brother and God the Holy Spirit became your Counselor and Guide.

Before Jesus' baptism, there very easily could have been questions about who Jesus really was, but after his baptism there was no denying that he was God's Son and our Savior. And friends, the same can be said of you. When you were baptized, these simple words were spoken: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The heavens may not have been ripped

open, but your soul was. Your sin-darkened soul was ripped wide open as the light of the Gospel shined into your heart and God the Holy Spirit came to live in your heart through faith. You were made CHILDREN OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER. Jesus' life, death and glorious resurrection were made your own. That means all your sins are forgiven. Yes, every one of them. Yes, even those terrible sins you've committed against your family members where you have failed to be a faithful Christian child, brother, sister, even spouse. Yes, even all the sins you've committed against your



heavenly family too! It's all been washed away.

Not only that, you've also been given a new heart with your sinful nature taken out of the driver's seat. That means as you daily remember your baptisms and the truth that you are **CHILDREN OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER**, you are also given the love and strength to love both your heavenly family and your earthly family in the ways that please God.

Friends, celebrate Jesus' baptism. It marks him beyond a doubt that he is your Savior. Also celebrate your own baptism. There you were made **CHILDREN OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER**. There you were given a new and everlasting family whose bonds cannot be broken and whose joy we only glimpse in this life. Know that because you are **CHILDREN OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER**, the words the Father spoke to his one and only Son can now also in a way be spoken of you: "You are my son, you are my daughter, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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