

**"AGE IS NOT AN ISSUE"**

Mark 1:4-11

Matthew Henry, born near Wales in the 1600's, was a well known Presbyterian pastor and Biblical scholar who wrote a renowned commentary on the Bible entitled: *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, also known as *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*. It was his father, Philip Henry, who wrote for his children the following words which became their baptismal statement:

I take God to be my chief end and highest good.  
I take God the Son to be my prince and Savior.  
I take God the Holy Spirit to be my sanctifier,  
teacher, guide, and comforter.  
I take the Word of God to be my rule in all my actions  
and the people of God to be my people  
under all conditions.  
I do hereby dedicate and devote to the Lord all that I am,  
all that I have,  
and all that I can do.  
And this I do deliberately, freely, and forever.  
Charles Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*

Our scripture passage today is focuses on the baptism of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

If you go and look on our church calendar, today is designated as *The Baptism of the Lord Sunday* for on this day we celebrate the inauguration of Jesus' ministry in his baptism by his cousin John in the Jordan River. This day's emphasis is on "manifesting" Jesus as the Christ of God. And, when you think about it, the Baptism of the Lord is connected with our baptisms, and we remember that in baptism we are claimed by Christ to share in his ministry. It is, therefore, a day to renew our baptismal vows and to reaffirm our commitment as disciples of the Risen Christ. You notice that the color of the cloths on the pulpit, lectern and Communion Table is white; thereby signifying that today is a festival of Christ.

Let me ask you a question- **Why does baptism matter?** I want to keep this question in front of us this morning.

This morning is a first for me- to baptize two cousins during the same service: Cassidy Myers and Taylor Smith.

Cassidy, who is almost 4 months old, comes as a result of her parents, Myssi and Jonathan, bring her forward for Infant or what is also known as Covenant Baptism. Taylor, who is 9 years old, comes on her own volition, and with the support of her parents, Kim and Tim, for what is known as Believer Baptism. What encouraged Taylor to come forward on her own was when, on Sunday, October \_\_ when two young men in our church, Alex Morgan and C.J. Moore were baptized during the service.

Parents bringing newborns to be baptized is one of the most important things they can do as a parent. For no matter how young a child might be, we Presbyterians believe God sends the gift of the Holy Spirit to be with and sustain this newborn. Now we all understand that a baby is too little to know what their baptism is all about. And that is why the parents' role is so crucial as they bring their child for baptism.

For it is on the basis of the parents faith that they come with the hope that their child will grow up in the faith, and love and eventually serve God as His chosen disciple.

On the other hand with Believer Baptism adults and youth who desire to publically confess their faith and who have not be previously baptized can be baptized.

And so you see, no matter what your age you are baptized, baptism celebrates the start of something new, your new life with Christ. **When someone is baptized they have taken the first step on a life-changing and life-giving journey into the heart of the Christian way.** Age is not an issue in the Presbyterian Church. Remember I asked the question at the beginning of my sermon- **Why does baptism matter? Well what matters, what is at issue here is commitment to Christ and our identity with Christ.**

What made Jesus' baptism so significant in our passage was His identity. Our passage tells of a particular past event which was, for all its similarity with thousands of other baptisms of its time and since then, was unique.

For John had already been out there in the wilderness proclaiming and performing a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins on countless numbers of people. For we read in Mark 1:5, "And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins." But what made Jesus' baptism so unique was what we read in verses 10-11, "And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'" The heavens being torn apart point to the cosmic significance of this unique baptism and the voice from heaven, just like John's preaching, only affirms

that Jesus is radically different, He is unique. John the Baptist was one of a number in the line of prophets who were in the mold of Elijah, but Jesus is out of this world, Jesus is of another order of greatness.

For Jesus is the Beloved Son of God whose relationship with the Heavenly Father is altogether different, His relationship with God is right and pleasing.

And the story that follows Jesus' baptism is a story of what Almighty God did through Him- for you and for me, for the world. That is why the baptism of Jesus matters for it tells us the true identity of Jesus.

And that is why our baptism matters. For in our baptism we identify with Jesus. Folks, **it is all about identity and it is all about commitment**. Baptism is not so much a theological doctrine as it is a life experience- a life experience for the parents of infants, a life experience for the infant who is taking the first step on a life-changing and life-giving journey, a life experience for the youth or adult who is baptized, a life experience of the congregation who serves as "God parents" and promises to

help the parents, to help the youth or adult in the raising and nurturing of the infant, in the nurturing of the youth or adult in the ways of Christ.

Friends, commitments were made today; vows were taken. This is serious stuff. Let me ask you, are commitments important to keep, are spoken vows important to maintain? You bet they are. And all of us are witness and participants in these vows, these commitments today. When Myssi and Jonathan said their vows, when Taylor responded in the affirmative as to her beliefs, when you, the congregation said, to the question, "Do you, the people of the church, promise to tell this new disciple and this child the Good News of the Gospel, to help them know all that Christ commands, and, by your fellowship, to strengthen their family ties with the household of God," and you said, WE DO. WE DO was not mere words being spoken to the wind. There was a commitment made, a vow was taken.

Too many people are walking around out there today who have been baptized but have stunted growths with regards to their faith; too many people have brought their children for baptism with no regard to the vows that they made and have basically stripped that which is a sacrament to nothing more than a ritual with very little significance. So we are all in this together: parents, congregation, and God. And we need to fulfill our commitments, our vows.

I have a little booklet here that is entitled: *What every Presbyterian should know ABOUT THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM*. Let me read a small portion of what it says: "In the day to day life [of those parents who bring their children for baptism it is] their responsibility is to: Make the child aware of God; pray with and for the child; set a good example of Christian living; build a family based on the spirit of kindness, respect and forgiveness.

At baptism, they have the responsibility to: bring their child to God to be baptized, promise to raise their children in the Christian faith, profess their own faith in God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and receive God's promise of grace for their children."

Friends, age is not an issue- it is all about our identity with Christ, it is all about our commitment to Christ. God bless us and help us as we all fulfill our vows as we seek to make Disciples for Christ and be Kingdom Builders who are truly building His Church here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

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Introduction: Matthew Henry and his father Philip's baptismal statement for his children...

A question: **Why does baptism matter?**

Infant or Covenant Baptism and Believer Baptism

Parents bringing newborns to be baptized is one of the most important things they can do as a parent

Believer Baptism

**When someone is baptized they have taken the first step on a life-\_\_\_\_\_ and life-\_\_\_\_\_ journey into the heart of the Christian way**

**Why does baptism matter? What matters, what is at issue here is \_\_\_\_\_ to Christ and our \_\_\_\_\_ with Christ**

What made Jesus' baptism so significant...

Why our baptism matters. For in our baptism....

Commitments and vows...

A booklet: *What every Presbyterian should know ABOUT THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM*

Conclusion: God bless us and help us as we all fulfill our vows as we seek to make Disciples for Christ and be Kingdom Builders who are truly building His Church here on earth as it is in heaven.