

January 13, 2019 - Kingdom of the Left Sunday & Baptism of Our Lord
Luke 3:15-22 "Standing in Line with Sinners – Standing Out as the Son of God"
A Sermon from Lutheran Family Service

It must have been quite a sight. The heavens opened; perhaps it looked like those rays of light piercing the misty clouds as they give way to the sun. Then a dove flutters down and lands on Jesus. What a picture! Then the most astounding part, that voice, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Yes, what a sight, Jesus standing out as the Son of God!

But what makes this scene even more astounding is the scene that preceded it. Luke gives us a picture of that scene prior to our text. Crowds from all over Judea were coming to see and hear John the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan river. Many were standing in line waiting for their turn to be baptized. Standing in line was a cheating tax collector. Next to him a murderous Roman soldier. Next to him, Jesus. Next to Him, a prostitute. Wait a minute! Jesus? What's He doing in such a line?

In that line Jesus, the Son of God, shows us the kind of God we have. A God who came in human flesh. A God who came to stand in line with sinners, to identify with sinners, to walk with sinners, to eat and drink with sinners, to seek and to save lost sinners just like you and just like me.

Jesus, standing out as the Son of God. Jesus, standing in line with sinners. What great comfort these pictures give! When you put them together, they form a picture of our Savior. He had to be true man and true God to accomplish our salvation. He had to stand out as true man on the cross to bear our sins, sins that are no better, and perhaps a lot worse, than the sins of those He stood in line with at the Jordan. He had stand out as true man to suffer God's wrath over our sins as He hung there on the cross.

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But He also had to stand out as true God as He hung there on the cross so His sacrifice would be a sufficient, one time sacrifice for all sins, for every sin, for every sinner, for you and for me. In Sunday School we learn over and over again, "Jesus died to take away my sins." That's good. But we need to grow in our understanding that the price paid to take away our sins was much more than the terrible death of a guy named Jesus.

Consider Acts 20:28. Here Paul gives advice and encouragement to the pastors at Ephesus. He says in this verse, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." Whose blood does he refer to in this verse? It's tempting to give the Sunday School answer and say, "Jesus." But look carefully. The antecedent of blood in this sentence is God! God purchased us sinners with His own blood. Yes, He did this in the person of His Son, Jesus, but the price paid for us was unimaginably higher than the blood of some martyr who died on a cross. God shed His blood for us. God gave us Himself for us in Jesus.

Jesus stood out as true man as He died on that cross and was buried. Along with His suffering, our sins necessitated His death and burial as well. His death paid sins' wages once and for all. But the darkness of death and the grave could not extinguish the Light and Life of the world. Jesus stood out as God as He rose from the dead and He remains both God and Man, enthroned with His Father and controlling all things as He holds them in His powerful, nail-scared hands.

Now He sends His Holy Spirit to accomplish what John said He would do, baptize. In the waters of Baptism, the power of this God-Man, Jesus, sets us apart as wheat is separated from

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the chaff. Jesus' Spirit gives faith and forgives sins for He baptizes us into His death. Jesus' Spirit gives us new life both now and eternally for He baptizes us into His resurrection. Someday our bodies will be raised perfect, never to die again. Never to hurt again. Never to cry again. But always to live with Jesus in perfect joy and peace.

So, what would Jesus have us do in the mean time? He asks us, who stand out as children of God, to stand in line with sinners. We cannot keep this good news locked up as Herod tried to do by imprisoning John. As John pointed out Herod's many sins, so we are called to help others see their sin and their need for a Savior. How can we do that? Scream and yell? Judge and condemn? I say we be Jesus to them. I say we stand in line with them! Stand in line with them as a fellow sinner. Stand in line with them, show compassion and help them with their needs. In doing so, God's Spirit will give us opportunity to address their greatest need, the need for Jesus and His forgiving love and hope-filled Word.

By the way, this is what Lutheran Family Service (LFS) does on our behalf every day. They are really an extension of our ministry to share Christ. Their mission is to stand in line with people, to walk with people who are experiencing hard times and help them the way God has helped us. They help people in the name of Jesus. They help people come to know the name of Jesus. They do this through mental health and pregnancy counseling. They do this through adoption services. They do this through a wide variety of congregational services that offer educational and faith building resources to Christ's baptized children.

One particular aspect of what LFS does that we focus on today is their work in what Luther called "God's Left-Hand Kingdom." In this "Kingdom of the Left," God rules through

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those He places in authority over us. One of those authorities is our government. Lutheran Family Service is your active voice in the public square working to defend the most vulnerable as they advocate for life from fertilization to natural death. They work to defend life through stopping Physician Assisted Suicide and fighting for the end of Abortion.

How can we be involved as baptized children of God to carry out our responsibility to stand in line with sinners and make a difference in our world? I draw your attention to the insert in today's bulletin. [This, of course, assumes you have downloaded the bulletin insert available from LFS! If not, you can still use the following in a manner you desire.]

Be Aware of issues that are spiritual in nature. Did you know that bills legalizing physician assisted suicide were introduced in the Iowa Legislature starting in 2016 and will be back again this year? Stay aware by signing up for the LFS E-news at www.LutheranFamilyService.org/news.

Pray for those who represent us and those who courageously stand up for God-given truths and thank them for such values.

Inform those who represent you about your position and values. Find your legislatures at www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find. Inform others about the importance of spiritual issues in politics.

Be Present at rallies, debates, and public forums if able. Make plans to attend the annual Prayer for Life Rally, February 21, at the capitol in the rotunda in Des Moines, Iowa.

Support Lutheran Family Service in their efforts to advocate for and educate on these crucial life issues. Make a gift online at www.LutheranFamilyService.org/donate or mail a check to: Lutheran Family Service, 409 Kenyon Rd, Ste C, Fort Dodge, IA 50501.

Today, as we observe the Baptism of our Lord, we rejoice that Jesus stood out as the Son of God. We also rejoice that Jesus stood in line with sinners. This God-Man did all that was necessary for our salvation. Through our Baptism, He joins us with His death and resurrection. We live as forgiven sinners with the certain hope of our own resurrection and life eternal. As

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we await that day, we pray that Jesus will give us joy and strength to stand out as children of God. As we await that day, we pray that Jesus will give us humility and compassion to stand in line with sinners. In His name, Amen.