

The Baptized Life - Only One Allegiance

Matthew 3: 13-4:11

Matthew 28: 16-20

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It was the beginning, the time of revelation to the world, the first step in a three year march to the cross. It was the baptism of Jesus. And with that baptism came a clear division of the two key powers that were battling in his life -

- the power of God
- the power of Satan.

No sooner is he out of the baptism water than he is carried into the wilderness for a time of direct, and intense, spiritual confrontation.

The baptism of Jesus - a proper thing to fulfill all righteousness.

That's what Jesus tells John the Baptizer.

And as they head down into the water, Jesus retraces steps travelled by Old Testament believers - down into the waters, and up again to new life.

Think Noah -

- In the midst of the storm of the flood, which destroyed the entire world.
- Then coming safe out of the ark to a new earth beginning.

Think Moses -

- In a little basket, laid into the Nile river, all alone.

Then being raised out of their by Pharaoh's daughter, to a new beginning in the royal court, and training that eventually would stand him in good stead as Israel's liberating leader.

Think Israel -

- Leaving centuries of oppression in Egypt, pursued by Pharaoh's army.

Down into the Red Sea, crossing it on dry ground, and rising up out of the water on the other side - safe in the new life of freedom, while their oppressors were drowned.

Or Israel again -

Standing on the bank of the Jordan River, down into it they go, behind the priests carrying the ark, down and across to the Promised Land, to a whole new beginning as the people of God.

Down into the waters - leaving the old life behind.

Rising from the waters - entering a new life in the care and blessing of God.

Jesus identifies with all that rich Old Testament history of God's saving work in the life of His people. He is completely one with that history, and one with God's people.

- Down into the water goes Jesus.

- And up - into the life that God His Father had prepared for Him.

What faces him right at the beginning of that God-given life and mission?

A strong period of stressful confrontation with the Devil - the Temptation of Jesus.

- There is the challenge of doubt - "**IF** you are the Son of God...."

- Challenging the very words that had come from the opened heavens, "*This is my Son, the Beloved...*"

- There is temptation to become self-serving with the making of bread.

- There is the temptation to move beyond faith to spiritual spectacle with leaping from the temple.

And there is the insidious temptation for power and control with kneeling before the devil in order to get all the lands as his own.

Jesus battles the Evil One.

And at the end, when he stands victorious, he is joined by his heavenly servants - angels, who come and care for his immediate needs.

That's the battle which faces the Baptized Jesus.

It's the battle that faces all who follow their Lord through the waters of baptism.

The battle to stand tall and strong for the One in Heaven who claims us as his beloved sons and daughters.

The battle against the Evil Usurper, who wants nothing less than to steal us away from heaven.

Understand that well, Christian.

There is no getting away from that battle.
The confrontation and clash between the two kingdoms is great.
It allows no compromise.
You are on one side or the other.
There is no middle ground.

Now, please understand that not everyone will accept this as plain truth. They'll try to tell you that this account is just a parable.

That the Devil is not a real person or being - as told here, it's just representative, just a picture of evil.
And evil is not concrete.
Evil is just an **absence** - it is the **absence** of good.
Hate, for example, is the absence of love.
That's what they'll say.

Which means that to move from harm to help, from wrong to right, from negative to positive, from evil to good - what you need is to somehow fill the absence.

Fill it, say, with knowledge.
Teach people about the right, about the truth - give people knowledge and they will move towards the good.... because, so they say, evil is absence.

Believers -

don't accept one word of that.
For evil is a **presence**. It is not just an absence.
Evil is the personal presence of something dark, irrational, and very real, very powerful. It is a dark power that can be extremely active, and clever, and even creative. It is a dark power that knows very well, and yet still hates and still destroys and still rebels against the Creator. It is the power that faced Jesus in the wilderness.

Believers -

In this church we affirm the existence of a demonic reality, a dark and powerful personal, spiritual presence.
Against that presence the baptized Jesus, identified as the beloved son of God, affirmed by Heaven and pleasing to God, fought with all his might.
And against that presence all baptized Christians are called to fight.

In the Bible the origins of evil, the origins of the Devil, are never explained.

And that is because it is not our business to be about explaining that evil.

Our business is to be facing it, and fighting against it.

Our business is to follow Jesus through the waters to new life, life in the Kingdom of Heaven - even while here on earth.

Our business is to live that new life - **even** when all the forces of temptation and evil are screaming at us, or seducing us, or sowing seeds of doubt within us to try and knock us off stride.

Even then, we live the new life.

I want to take you back to the early years of the Church's existence. It was beginning to expand across the western world. Converts were streaming into its membership and being baptized.

Let me share with you over the next few weeks some of the practices of the early Church as it involved baptism. When someone became a Christian, they would be assigned a sponsor, or mentor, and start a program of instruction and training. That program would last a few years. Throughout the course of it would be various rituals and prayers.

This instruction would climax during the 40 day period of fasting and instruction before Easter. It is the period we have come to know as Lent.

And then, on Easter weekend, the Bishop would be in the city. The new converts would gather for a great vigil service on Easter night. Various rituals and ceremonies would happen, that culminated early on Easter morning with the convert being baptised.

Today I'd like to focus with you on two early steps in the baptismal ceremony, steps that find their origin here in Matthew 3's encounter between the devil and Jesus. In future weeks I'll tell you about other elements of the ancient baptismal service.

Picture in your mind, if you will, a new convert. She has been taught in the faith, has sought diligently to turn what she has been taught into practice, and now gathers with other new believers on Easter Saturday before the bishop of the city.

In the dark of the night, the new convert undergoes an exorcism.

Ah, believers at Calvin, can you feel something inside of you saying, "Hey, wait a minute. That's weird!" - can you? Perhaps we're thinking too much of Hollywood. Instead, think of dark spiritual realities - realities that rebel against and seek to destroy all that is of God. Exorcism is the ritual of prayer and statement that publically renounces Satan and demands that he with all his evil host, lay loose their claim on this new believer. It is the renunciation of Satan.

And then, immediately on the heels of the exorcism, comes the public declaration of allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Both are important.

You cannot claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ without just as strongly claiming that you are **not** a follower of the evil One. You cannot declare allegiance to Jesus without renouncing Satan.

That is the way of the baptised life.

That is the way of Christianity.

It is uncompromising.

The Christian faith, you see, is much more than merely giving intellectual assent to a series of doctrines and statements.

Faith demands **faithfulness** - which is living action.

It is unconditional commitment.

It is total belonging.

You may declare a belief that there is a God.

All right. But it means nothing. James 2 tells us that even demons can declare that belief.

You must also declare Jesus to be Lord - to be the undisputed master of your life who is to be obeyed and followed, no matter what.

To declare Jesus as King is to follow Him in Kingdom-shaped living right here and now. It is about living today, not just in some distant, eternal by and by.

So what is it that the new convert, about to be baptized, renounces?

Is it just a few sinful acts that she could remember - some moments of immoral thought or word or deed?

No - it goes far deeper.

She renounces a whole set of priorities, a whole vision of life, a "world view" - she turns her back on that.

And then she turns right around and takes up a whole new set of priorities, a whole new vision of life, a whole new view of the world and her place in it - she faces it, declares allegiance to it, and prepares to live it.

There are two words that ancient church documents use to describe this action -

<i>Suntaxis</i>	vs	<i>Apostasis</i>
which means...		
<i>Uniting / adhering</i>	vs	<i>giving up, parting company with</i>

Suntaxis with Jesus Christ. *Apostasis* against the Evil One.

Here's how it would happen.

First the renouncing.

Tertullian, and Basil and Ambrose, among others describe the process.

The believer would stand and face the west. West was considered the direction of evil. She would raise her hands deliberately - not as in a prayerful act of surrender, as the Psalms speak of. But instead as an

act of defiance, as an act of pushing away. Willfull. They would raise their head - hold it high. No submission at all.

The Bishop would ask - *Do you renounce Satan?*

And she would say something like -

"I renounce Satan, and his works, and his pomps, and his worships, and his angels, and his inventions, and all things that are under him " (*Apostolic Constitutions* vii.476).

And the Bishop would pray a prayer something like this -

Look upon Thy servants;
Prove them and search them
And root out of them every operation of the Devil.
Rebuke the unclean spirits and expel them;
And purify the works of Thy hands.
And exerting Thy unshakable might,
Speedily crush Satan under their feet;
And give them victory over the Evil One
And over his foul spirits;
Expel from them every evil and impure spirit
Which hides and makes its lair in their hearts.
The spirit of error, the spirit of guile
The spirit of idolatry and of every sensual craving
The spirit of deceit and of every uncleanness
Which operates through the prompting of the Devil.
And make them sheep
In the holy flock of Thy Christ
Honourable members of the Church
Consecrated vessels, children of the light
Heirs of Thy Kingdom

[Schmemmann, p.26]

Then the convert would be instructed to give the ultimate insult to Satan.

They would be commanded to spit at him - spit to the west.

They renounce him thoroughly.

Then they would turn.

They would face the East, the direction of holiness.

And they would lower their hands.

For now they are receptive.

And they would bow their heads in service and submission.

And the Bishop would ask them something that sounded an awful lot like the oath of allegiance that soldiers were asked to give to their Commander In Chief.

Hast thou united thyself with Christ?

And she would say - *I have.*

Dost thou believe in Him?

I believe in Him as King and as God.

And then the believer would bow down.

Spit on Satan.

Bow before Christ.

And in that act of submission, the convert would find her true freedom.

Fellow believers -

We live in a society that desires to be all things to all people. Every way is good. Every belief is right. Every action, it almost seems, can be defended in one way or another. Right and wrong have become very relative terms.

Freedom and liberty and life are very much defined in terms of the individual. You are invited to do and to live whatever seems best to you personally. Your choices are as varied and as fluid as things seem to be in the election campaign. And it doesn't really matter, we're told.

Believers, it does matter.

It mattered for Jesus when he came through baptism and faced the devil head-on.

And it matters for us today.

We, too, have been baptised into a new order of living.

We, too, have one Saviour in life.

We look for and pray towards a new order in Creation when this Saviour will return.

And until He does, we commit to living as New Creation people.

Without compromise.

It is a matter of life - eternal life,
and death - eternal death.