**First Sunday after the Epiphany – The Baptism of Our Lord**

**Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY January 12, 2014**

**Based on Matthew 3:13-17 written by Vicar Ben Zuberbier**

**The Chosen One appears!**

**1) To fulfill all righteousness**

**2) So God is pleased**

*13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” 15 Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented. 16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”*

If you took a survey right now that asked what your favorite book series was, what would you put down? What about your favorite movie series? Would that be the same answer? Or would it change.

I took a look at the top selling book series and the highest grossing film series this last week and some titles appeared on both lists.

These titles that met success both in print and on film had characters who were considered “Chosen Ones.” Harry Potter was the Chosen One to kill “He who shall not be named,” but I will—“Voldemort.” Anakin Skywalker was the Chosen One to bring balance to the force, which didn’t happen until *Episode Six: Return of the Jedi* when under the name Darth Vader he threw the dark emperor over the railing and down to his death on the Death Star. Frodo Baggins took it upon himself to be the Chosen One to destroy the ring of Power, which he did by throwing it in the pit of Mordor saving Middle Earth from the oppressive reign of Sauron.

These are all fictional stories about “Chosen Ones.” But this morning we hear one that is non-fiction. Yes, today on the First Sunday after Epiphany we hear the story of another Chosen one—a Chosen One promised from the beginning and continually foretold through the prophets. **This Chosen One** appears on the banks of the River Jordan **to fulfill all righteousness** and **so God is pleased**.

**I. To fulfill all righteousness**

The time for the Chosen One to appear among the people of Israel was coming soon. And that’s exactly the message John the Baptist was trying to get across to the people who had gathered on the banks of the Jordan River. When these people came out to this site, they’d hear John preaching, “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near.” He’d then lead people down into the river to be baptized. This baptism of repentance was preparing a straight path for the Chosen One to enter in on. The prophet Isaiah had even foretold the prep work of John the Baptist, **“A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way. . . Make straight paths for him’” (Isaiah 40:3)**.

One day as the people were circled around John as he was preaching and baptizing for repentance, all heads suddenly turned—the Chosen One had walked down to the River! Here was Jesus, the Hope of Israel! The Savior of all mankind! But what he had come there for seemed a little strange to the people. Especially to John. He wanted to be baptized. John was confused. He thought Jesus had it wrong: **“I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?” (v 14)**. John knew the Chosen One standing before him was sinless. In fact, he knew the Chosen One was God and knew every sin he had ever committed.

Put yourself in John’s shoes. What if God came to you and asked you to baptize him? Wouldn’t you think, “God, don’t you know what kind of person I am? You tell me to honor my father and mother but my conversations with them often end by hanging up the phone or with a slammed door. You tell me to help defend my neighbor’s reputation but I’m always telling people about the things he does that really annoy me. You even expect me not to use your own Name for cursing or swearing, but I find myself using your Name in sentences it probably shouldn’t be in. And when it comes to loving you and trusting you above all other things in my life, well, don’t even get me started. When it comes to **meeting your righteous demands**, I need *you* to baptize me—just like John said.

You know what Jesus said to John? He basically told him, “John, why do you think I’m here? I’m the Chosen One, right? I’m doing this **to fulfill all righteousness**. It started when I was born. Then when I was eight days old, my parents brought me to the Temple to be circumcised. When I was twelve I was back there in the Temple learning from the brightest and the best, and learning more about my Father’s will for me—to keep and fulfill all his righteous demands. And now I’m here to continue **to fulfill this righteousness** in your place because you cannot, and in the place of all mankind because they cannot. This is exactly what God had in mind for me when he spoke about me through the prophet Isaiah, **“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. . . I the LORD have called [him] in righteousness” (Isaiah 42:1, 6).** And this baptism will mark the beginning of my three year ministry which will end at the cross. Now about that baptism: **“Let it be so now; it proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness” (v 15)**.

John probably thought, “Oooohhhh! What’s the hold up? Of course, let’s go down into the water here.” So he took Jesus down into the River and baptized him—the baptism done that the **Chosen One who had appeared among them might fulfill all righteousness**. This baptism was done for you and me.

**II. So God is pleased**

As Jesus came up out of the water, John and the people gathered on the banks had front row seats to nothing less than a phenomenal show. The skies cleared and the heavens opened up. The Holy Spirit came down from heaven like a dove and descended on Jesus. A voice came from above, **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (v 17).**

That voice from God the Father has eternal impact. It has impact today in this congregation. That voice was saying, “**This is my Son whom I am pleased** to have take the blame for your anger toward your parents and your arguing with them. **This is my Son whom I am pleased** to have take the blame for your destruction of other people’s reputations, for your misuse of my name, for your lack of love for me and shaky trust.” That voice of God was saying, **“He’s the Chosen One who’s fulfilling all righteousness and will die on the cross so I am pleased with you.”** The voice of God the Father that thundered at Jesus’ baptism echoes your forgiveness now.

John the Baptist and the people by the River saw something miraculous that day at Jesus’ baptism. Nothing less than a miracle happened at your baptism. God is not pleased with you because you made a commitment to lead a live that would please him. **He’s pleased with you** because you are clothed with his Son Jesus. When God looks at you, he basically is saying the same thing he said to his Son, the Chosen One, to Jesus, “Camden, you are my child. You are clothed with Jesus. **With you I am well pleased**.” And he says the same to any of us who have been baptized.

In fact, every time there’s a Baptism in this church, it’s nearly the same scene at this font as it was by the Jordan River that day. They heard the voice of God the Father. They witnessed the Holy Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove. They saw Jesus standing there on the edge of the water. What they really witnessed was the Trinity. They saw all three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And what you witnessed today was exactly the same thing. You might not have seen the three persons of the Trinity, but they were here when Camden was baptized. They were here *in name*. Pastor applied the water right here and said “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” You see, the Triune God was here. The Triune God was at Jesus’ Baptism. The more you look at Jesus’ baptism you realize it’s really an illustration of your own baptism—actually, it’s what makes your baptism valid.

When you read those books or watch those movies that highlight “The Chosen One,” they receive encouragement and support and strength from their friends when they really need it. Harry Potter got it from Ron and Hermione. Frodo got it at different times from Gandalf, Mary and Pippin, and Sam wise. When Jesus was baptized he received additional strength and encouragement from the Holy Spirit who descended on him. The Holy Spirit strengthened his resolve to lead a holy life, to resist temptation, to endure all parts of his ministry til he reached the goal. And at your Baptism you received the Holy Spirit as well. To give you strength to live a life that pleases God. To give you the resolve to resist temptation every day. Clothed in Jesus by Baptism, the Holy Spirit is with you as you strive to live a holy life. With the cloak of Christ on and with the Holy Spirit, you and I are able to live a life **that God is pleased with.**

To everyone who saw that momentous Baptism—the heavens ripped open, the Holy Spirit coming down like a dove, the voice of God the Father booming—the message was clear: **THE CHOSEN ONE HAS APPEARED.** They probably eagerly ran back to their towns and villages to let everyone know what had happened. “He’s here. **The Chosen One has come**.” Brothers and sisters, when you leave here today, will you carry that message with you? Will you have that same enthusiasm that itches to share this story with others? When you leave here today, even if you haven’t been comfortable telling others about Jesus, maybe you might consider giving it a try. You could go back home and share this message with your neighbors. You could go back to work tomorrow and share it with your friends. You have the Holy Spirit on your side who’s there to help you.

With that on your mind and before we leave here today, we’ll sing a prayer in the last verse of the closing hymn that God would help us as he sends us out to share this message—God, **“Help us hear your urgent summons, Calling us to serve you now. Send us forth, your sons and daughters, with the cross upon our brow” (CWS 709, stanza 4b)**. Leave here with this message: **The Chosen One has appeared! All righteousness has been fulfilled! God is pleased with you!** Amen.