

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

11th January 2026 – The Baptism of Jesus

Matthew 3:13-17

GOD'S LOVE AND GRACE FLOWING DOWN

When we talk about the basic necessities of human life, what kinds of things are we usually referring to? I'm guessing that what most likely comes into your head straight away is food and drink, shelter, clothing; the material things which are essential to our survival, albeit sometimes in different ways and forms depending on where we are living. You may or may not have had another on your list, and that is the human need to be loved. I'm going to widen that out a bit more here to include being loved, accepted, valued, included, and forgiven. We have come to accept more and more over time that the need of being loved and belonging, and we can even throw identity in there as well, is also a basic need for us as people. And we have come to know that, sadly, because we see the effects of what happens to people when they don't know and experience these things in their lives. As well as the basic needs of our physical life, food for energy, water for hydration, shelter and clothing to keep us warm and safe, as people we also have a deep and fundamental need to know that we are loved, that we belong, that we are accepted, affirmed and valued as who we are.

It does seem a bit strange to think about it like this, but because Jesus was both God and human, He had the same needs that we do. We know that He got tired, and hungry, and thirsty. We know also that although He loved everyone, He also had close relationships with His family and friends. We know too that He went through the same kinds of uncertainty and doubt that we do in our lives. And, in a way, it's fulfilling those human needs of Jesus of love, affirmation, and belonging, that His baptism is all about. Having so far only being told of Jesus' birth, fleeing to Egypt when He was two, and being in the Temple in Jerusalem when He was twelve, Jesus' Baptism now at about 30 years of age marks the beginning of His three years of public ministry which gives us most of the teachings and accounts we have from His life on earth. It's going to be a time when He is tested, faces opposition, is betrayed and abandoned by those closest to Him, will struggle with His work and what He has been sent to do.

And so, on this day, He is led out to the River Jordan where John the Baptist is baptising those who respond to his call to turn to God.

There's a number of ways to look at what was happening here, and what Jesus' baptism means both to Him and to us, and one of them is that, at this time, again at the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus receives the love, support, and affirmation, which is a basic human need. We are told here that when Jesus is baptised, heaven opens, the Holy Spirit comes down like a dove, and a voice says, "This is my Son, and I love him. I am very pleased with him." (v. 17) What do we hear in those words? Love. Acceptance. Affirmation. Support and encouragement for what is to come. The Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is present as Jesus is prepared for the work He will now begin. At this time through the voice of God and the coming down of the Holy Spirit the window of heaven is opened and God's love and grace come flowing down. Jesus is affirmed in His relationship with His Father, and given the strength and encouragement to now go out to do the things He will face in His life.

The baptism practiced here by John was a ritual washing followed by some parts of the Jewish faith, although for Jesus because of the presence of God's voice and the Holy Spirit it was much more than that. But three years after this, after He had died and risen again, one of the last things Jesus said to His disciples was to establish the practice of Baptism we have today. He said, 'I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth! Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with you always, even until the end of the world.' Matt. 28:18-20 CEV) If you look at what Jesus said, you will find strong links between the way Jesus now changes baptism up, and what happened at His baptism. There is the presence of our Triune God, including the voice of God through the words of Jesus Himself, and the Holy Spirit at work in baptism. And in Jesus' promise at the end, there is again that affirmation, a declaration of love, of acceptance, of being with us in all we go through.

In our baptism, through God speaking, through the Holy Spirit coming down, through what Jesus has done for us, we have God's love and grace flowing down to us. Whether you can't remember your baptism, or you remember it well, it is God, through the washing of the water, through His Word,

through the Holy Spirit at work, who gives your baptism its power, every day, of joining you to Jesus' death and His new life. As Romans 6:4-8 tells us, a reading we use in our funeral service as an assurance of the new life we have through our baptism, in our baptism we are joined to Jesus and all that He came to do for us, including the price of our sins being paid and rising to new life. Martin Luther, as someone who went through a lot of hardship in his life because of his faith, whenever things would really get him down, and he would struggle with what he was called to do, he would say, 'But, I am baptised!' There was his identity, his strength, His promise of God's love in all he faced. There also was the assurance of God's grace and forgiveness whenever he did sin, inevitable for us all as people. Like it was for Jesus, our baptism is now God's guarantee that we belong to God and can trust in His love and grace and all they now mean for us in our lives.

What does your baptism mean to you? Or, if you haven't yet been baptised, what do you think it will mean to you? One way we can look at it is that as we face different challenges, struggles, temptations, disappointments, in our lives, what we would like to be a nice smooth calm surface gets disrupted by the waves which all these things cause for us. Through baptism, along with the other window of God's grace in Holy Communion, God's love and grace come flowing down to make the ripples which spread out to calm those waves, to give us the security of God's peace in our lives. Our baptism reminds us that, like Luther, whatever we are going through or facing, we can say; But I am baptised! Nothing can break that link God has made with us. And so, we know God affirms us in everything we now do. In knowing we are loved, we can love. In knowing we are forgiven, we can forgive. In knowing we are joined to Jesus' death and life in our baptism, we can love and serve in all we do each day. Not only does God's love and grace flow down to us, but in knowing this we can now also allow it to flow through us.

We can also look at our baptism and what it means in our lives through the *Living Grace Prayer* we are currently praying in our congregation. Have a look and a think: how does that relate to your baptism? To take the first part, when we pray, 'Lord, thank you that in Jesus your love and grace has come into our world and our lives', we remember that God's love and grace flows down to us, that we live in this each day, and our baptism gives us a strong guarantee of that. When you pray that

prayer, you can remember the promises which have come to you through your baptism, you can find peace and strength in those promises, and you can know that what God promises will never change from His side. When you pray this prayer, stop, remember, give thanks to God that you can be so sure of these things.

And then the second part of then the second part of this prayer reminds us that we are now called to live out our baptism, ‘Help me to live and to love in a way that helps others to know your grace also.’ Jesus’ baptism was the beginning of His time to take God’s love out into the world, and that’s true for us also. Again, stop and think about what this means for you: how are you called to live and love so others can know God’s grace also. Perhaps this week take the time to pray this prayer more slowly, asking God to guide and lead you in the call He has for you as one of His people.

In the same way that at His baptism Jesus received the confirmation of God’s love, acceptance, affirmation, and forgiveness, as we remember the promises God made to us, and how He carried them out in Jesus, we know He says to each of us, ‘you are my child, and I love you. I am very pleased with you.’ God’s love and grace flow down to us in a number of ways, but a very physical and tangible occasion we are able to hold on to this happening is in our baptism. Just like He fulfills all of our physical needs, we can know God completely fulfills our need to know we are loved, that we belong, that we are forgiven, that we are accepted. Not just in our baptism, but every time we remember it and live it out, heaven opens and God’s love and grace come flowing down. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Do you remember the day you were baptised? If you don’t, what do you know about it? If possible, ask your parents or others who were there what they remember about that day.
- ‘But I am baptised!’ is the promise and assurance of God’s love which Martin Luther held on to with the things he faced in his life. Do ever think about God’s assurance of love and acceptance He gives you through your baptism? What are some situations in life these assurances could help you through?
- Our baptism, like that of Jesus, is also our call to go out and serve God as His people. How is God calling you? Are there any aspects of this call you struggle with? Bring this to Him in prayer.
- Use the *Living Grace* prayer to reflect on both God’s baptismal promises to you, and His call to take His love out. Pray each part of it slowly, opening yourself up to God speaking to you, affirming you, encouraging you, calling you by the Holy Spirit.

Pray: thank God for the assurances of His love and grace which He gives us through our Baptism. Pray for His help to allow His love and grace to both flow down to us and through us each day.

Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
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