

“Drumroll, Please!” Mark 1:4-11, Baptism of our Lord, January 11, 2015

Everyone knows what a drumroll is! A drumroll is a series of drumbeats so closely together that they sound like one continuous sound! And drumrolls are often used for introducing the arrival of a very important person upon the scene. This is how the Evangelist Mark uses the first 8 verses of his Gospel account to announce the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth upon the world’s stage.

Mark wants to substantiate his claim that the credentials of Jesus of Nazareth are impeccable, for there was another important figure whose coming into this world was also foretold by the Old Testament prophets to prepare his way. Quoting Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Mark writes: ***“The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, ‘Behold I send my messenger before you who will prepare your way; a voice of one crying in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord! Make his paths straight!’*** Then Mark tells us: ***“John appeared baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and Jerusalem and all the surrounding regions went out to him and confessing their sins they were baptized by him in the river Jordan!”***

Brothers and sisters by anyone’s standards the ministry of John the Baptist would have been deemed as highly successful! And why was John’s ministry such a great success?

(1) First of all because John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit of God, just as the Angel Gabriel prophesied to his father Zechariah that he would be.

(2) Secondly because John the Baptist fully embodied the message which he came to proclaim. The rather strange appearance and unusual lifestyle embraced by John the Baptist, was certainly something much more than a mere “gimmick” to catch the public’s attention! John’s style of dress and diet fully supported the message he came to proclaim.

John the Baptist knew exactly what he was doing! For he was assuming the very dress and the lifestyle of that Old Testament prophet from Tisbah by the name of Elijah (2 Kings 1:8) **WHO CALLED THE WHOLE COUNTRY OF ISRAEL TO A NATIONAL REPENTANCE. JOHN’S DRESS AND LIFESTYLE WERE A PUBLIC PROTEST AGAINST THE GODLESSNESS AND SELF-SERVING MATERIALISM OF HIS DAY. IT AMOUNTED TO A CALL TO SEPARATE ONESELF FROM THE SINFUL CULTURE, TO REPENT AND LIVE A LIFE NOW FOCUSED ON GOD. EVEN THE LOCATION OF HIS MINISTRY, OUT THERE IN THE WILDERNESS WAS MEANT TO EMPHASIZE THIS.** For it was out into the desert that the people of Israel were called by God when they were liberated from Egypt. Their making that long trek out into the desert was a subtle reminder of their ancestors’ disobedience and rebellion and a call to begin their lives anew again.

John the Baptist was a man who was willing to serve the LORD God in a self-denying manner and most humble way! And this becomes all the more evident to us when **Jesus’ own STAR-POWER BEGINS TO RISE** and John the Baptist’s disciples now fear that his life and ministry **was now going to be eclipsed by the life and ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!** This is when John the Baptist’s disciples came to him in a deep spirit of personal alarm! But we remember how John responded to their anxiety-induced concerns. In

John 3:27-30 we read that John answered them: *"You yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice! Therefore this joy of mine is now full! HE MUST INCREASE, BUT I MUST DECREASE!"*

Why is the baptism of Jesus such an all-important event in our Lord's life and ministry! The baptism of Jesus serves much like a drumroll too for everything that is to follow after it in the next three years! The appearance of Jesus on the world's stage is **the solution that God seeks to offer to all of the discord and disharmony so evident among human beings brought there by sin!** And here I am talking about the ongoing problem among us human beings of family feuds!

"And the survey says!" Many of you know where you have heard these words before. They are words that are spoken the host on that popular television game show **"Family Feud,"** that first appeared on CBS in 1976 and ran for 32 consecutive years until it was cancelled in 1985. The show has been revived many times, and if I am not mistaken, is still being broadcast and hosted by Steve Harvey today. **The show is called "Family Feud" because it calls upon two different families to compete in a contest in which each family seeks to give the correct answers to questions on a survey that were asked of 100 people.** This kind of family feud is harmless indeed, but most family feuds are not this docile and tame.

Family feuds are as old as the story of Cain and Abel, the two sons of Adam and Eve, both of whom were raised outside the Garden of Eden. When the Lord God was pleased with the sacrifice Abel offered him one day, but was displeased with the sacrifice of Cain, Cain grew jealous of Abel and ended up striking him with a fatal blow! After this happened the LORD God came to Cain and asked him, *"Where is your brother Abel?"* But Cain replied in a most flippant manner by saying to the LORD God, *"I don't know am I my brother's keeper?"* And the answer to that question was yes, God was expecting Cain to provide help and support to his brother and never to bring about his death and demise!

Family feuds are nothing new! Family feuds are as old as the story of Cain and Able. Family feuds are as old as the story between Jacob and Esau. Family feuds are as old as the story of the Patriarch Joseph and his 10 older brothers while he was still a young man! Family feuds are as old as the story of how Moses, raised in the pharaoh's household became alienated from the family that adopted him and was later used by God to liberate the Hebrew people from their slavery in Egypt. Family feuds are as old as that time which came about when the people of Israel were then divided into two separate kingdoms; Israel to the north, and Judah to the south.

Family feuds are as old as that American legend of epic proportions concerning the Hatifelds and McCoys, one family of which was living on the state line of Kentucky and the other of which was living upon the state line of West Virginia. That family feud went on all through the 1880s and the 1890s and resulted in many police and judicial actions being taken against both families, eventually resulting in an appeal that eventually made it all the way to the Supreme Court in 1888.

I was surprised to turn on the television this past Monday morning and learn of a family feud in Sumter, South Carolina, that has been going on over there for a year between the Henderson family and the Gainey family. At one time each family had restraining orders taken out on one another, but those restraining orders had since expired. The news report I read said that when two brothers Joshua and Joseph Henderson were leaving the FOOD LION on Highway 15, when one of them saw Crystal Gainey, Donnie Gainey's wife, parked behind them in a car. Mrs. Gainey allegedly got out of her vehicle and tried to spray the Henderson brothers in their faces with mace. When the Hendersons left the parking lot they also called their father asking him to meet them at Young's Food Store just a few miles away. Once they got to that store, the police report says that Mrs. Gainey parked behind them again and was approached by Joseph Henderson Sr., the siblings' father. At some point investigators says she sprayed Henderson in the face with mace, and he retaliated by punching her in the face. Gainey's husband Donnie arrived at the scene and got in the middle of things.

During the fight, the incident report says Mrs. Gainey approached Joseph Henderson Sr. and began firing a gun in his direction. Then the Hendersons pushed Donnie Gainey to the ground and tried to leave the scene, and when they did, their vehicle struck and ran over Gainey and dragged him 30 yards. Fortunately he survived and was then airlifted to a Columbia Hospital where he remains in critical condition.

Even though the news report I also read said, **“This all started when Joshua and Joseph Henderson were leaving the Food Lion,”** we know that this great family feuds and all family feuds were started long before then. This family feud started way back in the **Garden of Eden at creation’s dawn**. And one of the things we are celebrating today as we are gathered to commemorate the Baptism of our **Lord is that he is the One whom the LORD God has sent into this world to help all of us resolve our family feuds.**

Jesus Christ fully embodied the message of God’s salvation that the Heavenly Father sent him into the world, not only to proclaim, but to be and to become! ⁹*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.* ¹⁰*And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.”* And a voice came from heaven, *“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”*

The city of Nazareth, where our Lord Jesus Christ had been living in relative obscurity for the first thirty years of his life, was located halfway between the Mediterranean coast and the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee. This mean that Jesus, now 30 years old, made about a 100 mile journey from where he was living to where John was baptizing people down there on the banks of the Jordan River.

As a voice speaks from heaven, “You are my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased” (v. 11), the Heavenly Father makes a drum roll too; for the Heavenly Father is giving his own testimony to all the world regarding his only-begotten Son. In those moments, Mark tells us that Jesus literally saw the skies being torn open and the Holy Spirit descending upon him in the form of a dove (v. 10). **Not only does the Heavenly Father, as the First Person of the Godhead, bear witness to Jesus’ being God’s Son, but the Holy Spirit also testifies that Jesus is the Son of God by his visible manifestation and “epiphany” here.**

But let’s remember that Jesus was not being baptized for the same reason that a whole host of other folks were being baptized by John the Baptist down there in the Jordan River that day! They were being baptized as those who were repenting of their own sins and as a visible sign that they were receiving the forgiveness of sins in that Spirit-induced action (Mark 1:4). **Theirs was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. They were thereby confessing publicly to God and others all around them their own sins. But Jesus was without sin (Hebrews 4:15).** St. Matthew tells us that John the Baptist himself was taken aback by what Jesus was requesting. Nevertheless Jesus told John: **“Let it be so for now, in order to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15).** Though Jesus was without sin, he was in that moment assuming the burden of our sin upon himself, as one subjected to the demands of God’s law on our behalf. (John 7:39-30). And Jesus was delighted to do his Father’s will (Psalm 40:7-8; John 4:34; John 8:29).

But this public baptism of Jesus was also God the Heavenly Father’s way of introducing Jesus to John and to the people of Israel. And while there may be some great dissimilarities between Jesus’ baptism and our own individual baptisms, there are some great similarities between Jesus’ baptism and our baptism too.

When we were baptized the skies were probably not torn open in a visible fashion! Nor did the Holy Spirit descend upon us visibly in the form of a dove. Not did we hear a voice speak directly to us from heaven. And unlike Jesus we were not being baptized for the sins of others, but for our own sins too. But our baptism is like Jesus' baptism in that it became a (1) public proclamation of our faith, and publicly identifies us as those who are in a relationship with Jesus Christ, just as Jesus' baptism publicly identified him with the people of Israel. (2) God's Spirit was also poured out upon us on that day! While our baptism is for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), (3) our baptism is also an outward visible sign of our invisible union with Christ, especially into his death and into his resurrection also (Romans 6:3-7).

When the Apostle John writes his first letter that appears in the New Testament concerning the problem of "loveless-ness" among some Christians in the early church, he powerfully reminds us that God's love is not simply a thing to be admired from a distance! It is, rather, the power that transfers those who have faith from death to life, from the realm of hatred to love. It is a power that still needs to be fully embodied by us today!

Imagine that a friend is standing right next to you at the end of a pier jutting out into the ocean. You throw a life-preserver out into the water with a long rope attached. If you then turn to him and say: "See how much I love you?" the action will seem odd at best. If you are both safely stationed on the pier, how does your action embody any type of love for your friend whatsoever? **But if your friend is actually out there in the water and drowning, and you throw him a life-preserver you don't need to say anything regarding your motivation. You don't need to say, "I love you," because his life has been saved by you.**

I like the story about the little baby who was baptized one Sunday, and in the church service were his father, his mother, and the baby boy's older brother who was 7 years old. On the way home, the 7 year old, seated in the back seat with the baby who was in his car seat, no doubt began crying uncontrollably. His father asked him three times, "Johnny, what's wrong?

"Why are you crying?" And finally on the third time Johnny spoke up and answer his father.

"The pastor said he hoped that we would be raised in a Christian home, but we were hoping to stay with you and mom!"

The Bible teaches us that after Cain committed his fatal assault against his brother Abel that he did repent of his sins, and was grossly fearful saying to the LORD, ***"My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me this day away from the ground; and from your face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me."*** Then the LORD said to him, ***"Not so! If anyone slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD put a mark on Cain lest anyone who came upon him should kill him."*** (Genesis 4:13-15)

When many of us were baptized, the officiating minister made the sign of the cross both upon our foreheads and our hearts to remind us that we too have been redeemed by Christ the crucified. I like the story I heard about one 6 year old little girl who was being baptized in church one morning and she must have listened intently to what the pastor was saying. For when she went back into the church pew and sat down next to her grandmother, she looked at her grandmother, pulled her bangs

aside that were covering her forehead and asked her grandmother: “Is the mark still there?” meaning is the mark of the cross still there?

Brothers and sisters this is the question that God is asking of every one of us today as we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. Is the mark of the cross still visible to others that we received when we were baptized—by the way we live and interact with one another and the unbelieving world? Can the people of this world still see that we are those who embody God’s message? Are our lives still a drumroll for announcing the presence of Jesus into our world today? Amen