

Baptism of Our Lord, January 10, 2021
“A Holy Connection” (Mark 1:4-11)

The lights won't come on if the power is off. That's a fact, but sometimes our actions seem to ignore that fact. As humans, we are creatures of habit. Most of the time, we're operating on automatic pilot, doing a lot of things without really thinking about them.

How many of you, like me, when experiencing a power outage, will walk into a dark room and flick the light switch, even while candles are burning in the room we leave? We do it automatically, don't we? And if it is an extended outage, we'll, no doubt, do it more than once. We know the lights won't work without electricity and we know that our access to electricity has been interrupted, but we keep flicking the light switch anyway.

No, the lights won't come on if the power is off. This is a universal truth that applies to more than electricity. It applies to our spiritual lives, as well. We can't shine spiritually if the power is off. We can't find meaning and proclaim truth if we are not plugged into the main source of power. We know this is true, yet many Christians try to shine the light of Christ while the main breaker is in the off position.

The lights won't come on if the power is off. This universal truth can be seen in creation itself. In our first lesson from Genesis, we read that the universe was a formless void – a vast, dark chaos – before God began creation. It tells us that darkness covered the face of the deep. But before God could begin making something of this vast darkness, it says that the wind, or Spirit, of God swept over the face of the deep. Then God said, *Let there be light*.

You see, before God could turn on the lights, the universe had to be plugged into a power source. And that power source is the Spirit – or presence – of God. Without the Spirit of God the universe would still be a dark place. You and I could flick the switch all day long and it would still be dark. This universal principle that the lights won't come on if the power is off applies to us also since we are a part of this creation. If the universe can't run without a power source, then neither can we.

Perhaps we can see this principle at work in Jesus' own life. Mark writes: *In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John*. We don't know a lot about Jesus' first 30 years in Nazareth, but we do know he was a carpenter, probably living a pretty peaceful and ordinary life. Mark tells us that, in those days, he left that life to begin a new one. He left the comfort of Nazareth to begin traveling about, teaching, and healing. He gave up the security of the carpenter's shop for the hazards of the open road. He left a peaceful existence for a life destined to end on the cross.

In those same days, Mark tells us, John was baptizing in the Jordan River. John told the people that they had turned from God. He called them to repent of their sins. And many responded. They flocked to John because they knew he was right. They wanted and needed to turn their lives around. They wanted to turn from their selfishness and sinfulness to a new life of loving God and neighbor. So they came; they repented; and John baptized them to demonstrate God's forgiveness. And Jesus, who was among them, came to be baptized as well.

But Jesus didn't need to repent, did he? Unlike all other humans, he had never turned from God. He was sinless, having nothing to repent. So, why did he insist on being baptized? Like those people along the Jordan, Jesus was leaving his old life behind. Like them, he was being obedient to God. He was surrendering his life to God's will. So, despite John's objections, Jesus was baptized.

Then right after he was baptized, something happened. The heavens were torn apart and the Spirit of God descended on Jesus. The power of the Holy Spirit sent from God the Father was descending upon and filling the Son. And God's voice declared, *You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.*

This event is important because it demonstrates this universal principle we're talking about. It shows that Jesus' power was from above – from Almighty God. Without the power of God, Jesus could not have done the things he did. He could not have healed the sick or cast out demons. He could not have multiplied the loaves or calmed the sea. He could not have forgiven his disciples for deserting him or willingly die for the very men who nailed him to the cross. Nor could he have been the Lamb of God slain for the sins of the world.

Now, we must understand this: Jesus was born the Son of God. He *was* the Almighty God in the flesh. He didn't need an infusion of power to work miracles. He *was* that power incarnate. But for our benefit, God demonstrated through Jesus the truth that we need to be connected to God.

In the baptismal waters of the Jordan, God was claiming Jesus as his own. This was a signal to Jesus that the time had come for him to start living out his true identity. Jesus' baptism was his calling to begin saving the world. And that is what Jesus did. God said, *You are my beloved Son*, and immediately Jesus started acting like the Son of God. The first thing he did was to go into the wilderness to meet and defeat Satan. Then he started gathering together his disciples. So, you see, his baptism was an example to us. He wanted to show those who would be his followers the kind of relationship they would have with God when they were connected to God.

No, Jesus didn't need to repent of his sins, but we do. We need to allow God to wash our lives clean. And just like at Jesus' baptism, when we come to God the Holy Spirit descends on us and we become a new creation.

So, to recap a bit, in the beginning there was water. The Spirit swept over the water. Then God spoke, and a new creation was formed. The key elements were water, Spirit and word. Then at Jesus baptism, we have the same elements. Jesus went into the water. The heavens were torn apart and the Spirit descended. A voice from heaven – the word of God – affirmed who Jesus was. From that point, he left his old way of life behind and began his ministry to save the world.

From these texts, we see that new and exciting things happen when there is this three-fold combination of water, spirit and word. Things are created. Things are transformed. Things are made new. The Spirit of God is unleashed and the power of God changes everything.

That's what happens in our baptism as well. In baptism, we are eternally connected to the True Power Source. When we pass through those holy waters we, too, are changed. We become new

creations. The sin that is an inherent part of who we are is forgiven. We are chosen, claimed, and adopted by God. We are accepted as his children and become recipients of his lavish love and grace. We die to our old selves and are raised to new and eternal life with him. And we are given the Holy Spirit. The power of God breaks through sin and death and works to make us holy and righteous before God, something we could never do for ourselves.

Baptism truly is a wonderful gift of God's grace to us. But with it comes responsibility. Look at how Jesus responded. After he was baptized, he didn't just stand there. He immediately started acting like the Son of God. His baptism, you see, was calling him to ministry. And because he was connected to God's power, he was equipped for mission and ministry.

This brings us back to where we began. The lights won't come on if the power is off. Baptism is our holy connection to God. Through this sacrament, God is eternally connected to us. However, the question is: do we maintain and grow our connection with God? Can we live out our baptismal calling, can we find meaning in life without reading God's word in the Holy Scriptures, without hearing his word proclaimed and receiving his life-giving meal? Trying to live without that connection is like standing in the dark and flicking a light switch while the main breaker is off.

We can't live a truly Christian life on our own. The only way to live a Christian life is to empty ourselves and be filled with the spiritual power from above, which means to be plugged into God, maintaining that holy connection. Only then will we be able to find the strength to face the troubles of life. Only then will we be able to forgive and put the past behind us. Only then will we see miracles happen in our lives.

The lights won't come on if the power is off. God Almighty is the only power source for abundant life. So let us, his baptized children, consistently turn to him in faith and devotion. Let us surrender to his will, just as Jesus surrendered and was obedient, even unto death on a cross.

My friends, may the Almighty fill you with the Spirit and work in you. Then stand back and watch the lights come on in your life. Amen.