

Luther Hymn: To Jordan Came the Christ, our Lord—LSB 406

Rev. Aaron Hambleton

We have come in our series to another of Luther's catechetical hymns. These are the hymns, which Luther wrote to aid in parents teaching the faith to their children and pastors doing the same with their parishioners. Where the great reformer used the actual texts of the 10 Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer as the basis for those respective hymns, he slightly changed his tactic when writing the hymn for the fifth chief part, Holy Baptism.

Luther doesn't bring the singers to the end of the Gospel accounts, where Jesus gave the command to baptize—which is the foundation and source of Baptism. Instead, he brings us to the banks of the Jordan River at the beginning of our Lord's earthly ministry and gives a running commentary on the significance and meaning of what lays before our eyes. In fact, Luther's commentary on this is so profound and is packed with so much imagery and Gospel, that I encourage you to ask your pastor about Luther's sermon on the Baptism of our Lord. He'll be thrilled.



500 Years of the Lutheran Reformation
Southeast Circuit North Dakota District

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1.To Jordan came the Christ, our Lord,
To do His Father's pleasure;
Baptized by John, the Father's Word
Was given us to treasure.
This heav'nly washing now shall be
A cleansing from transgression
And by His blood and agony
Release from death's oppression.
A new life now awaits us.

2.O hear and mark the message well,
For God Himself has spoken.
Let faith, not doubt, among us dwell
And so receive this token.
Our Lord here with his Word endows
Pure water, freely flowing.
God's Holy Spirit here avows
Our kinship while bestowing
The Baptism of His blessing.

3.These truths on Jordan's banks were
shown
By mighty word and wonder.
The Father's voice from heav'n came
down,
Which we do well to ponder:
"This man is My beloved Son,
In whom my heart has pleasure.
Him you must hear, and Him alone,
And trust in fullest measure
The word that He has spoken."

4.There stood the Son of God in love,
His grace to us extending;
The Holy Spirit like a dove
Upon the scene descending;
The triune God assuring us,
With promises compelling,
That in our baptism He will thus
Among us find a dwelling
To comfort and sustain us.

5.To His disciples spoke the Lord,
"Go out to ev'ry nation,
And bring to them the living Word
And this My invitation:
Let ev'ryone abandon sin
And come in true contrition
To be baptized and thereby win
Full pardon and remission
And heav'nly bliss inherit."

6.But woe to those who cast aside
This grace so freely given:
They shall in sin and shame abide
And to despair be driven.
For born in sin, their works must fail,
Their striving saves them never;
Their pious acts do not avail,
And they are lost forever,
Eternal death their portion.

7.All that the mortal eye beholds
Is water as we pour it.
Before the eye of faith unfolds
the pow'r of Jesus' merit.
For here it sees the crimson flood
To all our ills bring healing
The wonders of His precious blood
The love of God revealing,
Assuring His own pardon.

One thing in which we miss out with the LSB is Luther's original heading for the hymn: "A Spiritual Song of our Holy Baptism, which is a fine summary of What is it? Who established it? What are its benefits?" Luther made it very clear that the purpose of the hymn was to answer and teach those three questions. We, who are continual students of the catechism, remember the first three questions What is Baptism? Which is that Word of God? What benefits does Baptism give?

The first question What is Baptism? finds its answer in the first, fourth, and seventh stanzas, with the fourth serving as the hymn's main focus. The second question Who established it? is answered by the second and third stanzas. The third question What are its benefits? finds itself as the completion in stanzas five and six. We even find the question from the Catechism How can water does such great things? in the seventh and final stanza.

Sing this hymn. Know this hymn and take it with you into the world. Find comfort knowing that Christ came to you, washed you in water and Word, covered you with His blood, assuring you of His own pardon.

Next Week: Lutherans Today—Rev. Matthew Tooman

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