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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Baptism of Our Lord, Series C  
Saturday, January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
Sunday, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Sermon: Praying with Jesus<sup>1</sup>  
Text: Luke 3:15-22

Focus: Jesus prays for us.

Function: That they would pray about their life decisions, big and small.

Structure: Story-Applied

Locus: “The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also” (SC, “Third Petition of the Lord’s Prayer”).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Today is the Baptism of Our Lord, that Sunday every January when we remember the Baptism of Jesus and the voice from heaven that declares, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22, ESV).<sup>2</sup> And normally on this Sunday you would hear a message about how God is also pleased with you because of *your* Baptism and the washing away of your sins. But that’s not what I’m going to preach about today. I want to focus on one little word in Luke’s story: “praying” (v. 21). Even though all the Gospel writers record Jesus’ Baptism, only Luke tells us that “when all the people were

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this sermon was originally preached on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010, at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Englewood, Colorado.

<sup>2</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized *and was praying*, the heavens were opened...” (Luke 3:21).

Jesus was praying. What was he praying about? We don't know. But I like to imagine that he was praying for the people being baptized and the people he would minister to over the next 3 years. After all, Jesus' Baptism marks the beginning of his earthly ministry (Luke 3:23). It would not be an easy task of preaching, teaching, healing, and—ultimately—dying on the cross. And so Jesus prayed, entrusting himself to the Father's leading and guidance for his messianic mission.

The Gospels mention many times the prayer life of Jesus. And often, as in Luke's Gospel, they occur right before big decisions or important turning points in Jesus' career. Jesus prayed at his Baptism just before his temptation by the devil in the wilderness (Luke 3:21). He went up on a mountain to pray just before calling the twelve apostles, the followers who would labor with him in his mission and ministry (6:12-16). He prayed before making his first passion prediction to his disciples, a prophecy about his death on the cross (9:18-22). He prayed before his miraculous transformation on the Mount of Transfiguration

(9:28). And he prayed and pleaded in the Garden of Gethsemane the night of his betrayal—the night before his crucifixion (22:40-46). Time after time, when trouble was afoot or Jesus had something big in the works, he went to his heavenly Father in prayer. Even the Son of God needed to pray.

Jesus' own exemplary prayer life inspired his disciples to ask him, "Lord, teach us to pray..." (Luke 11:1). They recognized the importance of prayer in the Christian life, the necessity of the Father's guidance. And if asked about the priority of prayer, I'm sure that each and every one of us would answer, "Prayer? Oh, yes! That's the most important part of being a Christian!"

But when it comes down to brass tacks, I wonder how often we forget what we know. Sometimes it seems that we view prayer more as a last resort than a first resort. We pray when we're in a bind, when we've gotten ourselves into some kind of mess we can't get out of, and we finally pray, asking God to bail us out. We pray in panic on the highway when someone cuts us off and we cry out, "Oh, my God!" We pray when we or a loved one are sick or dying. And we *should* pray in

all of these situations... But shouldn't we also pray *before* we're in those situations?

There's a poem by Grace L. Naessens that captures this idea well:

"The Difference"

A poem by Grace L. Naessens

*I got up early one morning  
and rushed right into the day;  
I had so much to accomplish,  
I didn't have time to pray.*

*Problems just tumbled about me,  
and heavier came each task.  
Why doesn't God help me? I wondered,  
He answered, "You didn't ask."*

*I wanted to see joy and beauty,  
but the day toiled on, gray and bleak.  
I wondered why God didn't show me,  
He said, "But you didn't seek."*

*I tried to come into God's presence,  
I used all my keys at the lock.  
God gently and lovingly chided,  
"My child, you didn't knock."*

*I woke up early this morning,  
and paused before entering the day.  
I had so much to accomplish  
That I had to take time to pray.*

The message of this poem certainly rings true for me. I find that the days or weeks in which I neglect significant time of prayer and devotion are generally the times when my life becomes difficult. The times when I'm not in prayer are the times when I become impatient, irritable, anxious, and stressed. And the times when I try to make decisions based solely on logic or emotions are the times when my decisions turn out the worst.

How different would our lives be if we began every task with prayer? Imagine how much better prepared to meet the challenges of each day we would be if we began those days in conversation with our heavenly Father. If Jesus, the sinless Son of God, needed to pray, how much more we need to do the same. The task begun without prayer is the task begun in error. How different would our lives be if we prayed before traveling, job interviews, taking tests, driving to work, turning on the T.V., or entering the voting booth?

I know what you're thinking. "Sounds wonderful...but not very realistic! How could I possibly pray about *everything* I do?" And yet that's exactly what the apostle Paul encourages us to do. "Pray without

ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). “Never stop praying” (1 Thess. 5:17, GWN).

Without listening to the Lord in his Word and speaking to him in prayer, we don’t stand a chance of finding our purpose or direction in life. We need the Lord to lead us every hour, minute, and second of our lives.

We need him guiding and directing us in the way we should go, not only in the big things, but in the little things as well.

The Bible says that Jesus prays for you constantly. Where we fail and forget to pray, Jesus prays without ceasing. He prays *for you*. The Apostle Paul tells us that Christ sits “at the right hand of God... interceding for us,” praying for us (Rom. 8:34). And the author of the Letter to the Hebrews encourages us with the words that Jesus “*always* lives to make intercession for [us]” (Heb. 7:27). “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Rom. 8:28).

I’m not sure what Jesus is praying about up there in heaven. But I trust he’s praying for your health, your happiness, your family, and your faith. And I bet that he’s praying for the most important thing of all: the

forgiveness of sins. For even as Christ hung dying on the cross, pouring out his blood for us, he still had the presence of mind to pray. And so he prayed for the people who put him on the cross, people like you and me, whose sins demanded the death of the sinless one. Our wayward, misdirected lives tended only in one direction: sin. So Jesus offered the prayer that he only he could utter: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). “Father, forgive.” It’s a prayer the world needed then, and it’s a prayer we need now. Father, forgive us for our stupidity and sin. Father, forgive us for neglecting our need for you. Father, forgive us for failing to come to you in prayer. Father forgive us, because we need all the help we can get. Father, forgive.

And because Jesus is God’s “beloved Son,” the one in whom he delights and is well-pleased (Luke 3:22), the Father listens to Jesus and answers his prayer. He forgives us. And he invites us to come to him in prayer. May we take the time to pray in all matters, big and small, trusting that God will hears us and answer for the sake of his Son Jesus. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit.

Amen.