

“Identity Protection”

“... ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased’” Mark 1:11.

Identity protection is an increasing need in our world. As more and more people remotely do all kinds of tasks, the risk of identity theft is a concern that continues to grow. Paying bills online, shopping online, various apps and websites for education, entertainment, etc. typically need accounts that require some personal information. All of these examples share some of our identity and serve as a reminder that we must be ever careful to protect our identity.

Because of this growing need, companies have developed better ways to ensure identity protection. Most banks now include card monitoring protocols in the services they offer. Insurance companies have their own identity protection services or have teamed up with other companies to offer this option. A new realm of businesses solely focused on protecting people’s identities has risen through the years. Like with most services, the more you’re willing to pay, the more protective services you receive.

Well before the need for modern-day identity protection arose, God was in the business of identity protection. Unlike today’s protection needs with finances and personal information, God’s identity protection focuses on the bodies and souls of people. God’s protective services don’t have any catchy names like Identity Guard, LifeLock, Experian, etc. His protective services are simply known by the name Holy Baptism and it’s something that He’s been offering for a very long time.

In our readings this weekend, we get a description of the identity protection services God provides. While these descriptions don’t come to us in bullet point form, we still can appreciate the fullness of what God delivers in these narrative descriptions. The core of what God offers is heard in our Gospel reading from Mark with Jesus’ baptism.

Mark’s brief account reveals to us that the identity protection God provides is forever linked to Jesus’ identity. **“...‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased’”** (*Mark 1:11*). God the Father’s statement is a statement of identity for Jesus and Jesus’ followers. This not only clarifies Jesus as true God but also reveals His pleasing relationship with God the Father as true man – something no other human being has had since the Fall!

It’s this very Jesus who goes to John the Baptist, not to confess His sins and be baptized, but to be baptized and take upon Himself the sins of all the repentant humans who had been convicted of their sin by the Lord’s Word. The identity protection God provides in Baptism comes by means of substitution. Jesus takes on repentant sinners’ sins and repentant sinners receive Jesus’ righteousness, that pleasing relationship with God the Father. Through Baptism, they become His children and are declared pleasing to Him by His Word.

God’s identity protection plan hinges on Jesus, and the power of this plan is clearly seen by considering our Old Testament reading from Genesis. Just like with the beginning of creation where the eternal, Triune God by His Word brings something out of nothing, so also in Baptism the eternal, Triune God is present, bringing faith from nothing by His Word and water. The power of God’s protection plan comes from His Word attached to His chosen means of water, once again creating something from nothing – making a new creation in the life of a dead sinner.

The simplicity of Mark’s account of Jesus’ baptism affirms this new creation power. At Jesus’ baptism, no one else speaks! Only God speaks! That’s what is important! God speaks and He attaches this new creation, baptismal power, to Jesus, God in the flesh. In Jesus, things are once again well pleasing to God. In Jesus, the earth once again hears God speak that something was good, very good!

God’s protection plan also has a lifetime guarantee. There is no monthly payment plan for those who receive this baptismal protection from the Lord. It comes at no cost to the receiver! Rather, Jesus

pays for this protection for each believer. His life and death fully cover the debt that is owed, and God chooses to include this payment in His identity protection plan that He offers to all people.

Our reading from Romans makes this connection for us. Paul explains that in Holy Baptism, we are connected to Jesus' death. We are connected to the One who has died once for all! Included in this baptismal protection plan is the forgiveness for all the world's sins, even yours and mine! Baptism in Christ means that our sinful natures are powerless. Sin no longer rules over us in this world, and it has no lasting effects on our eternity. Instead, connected to the One who has power over death, who has brought death to death itself, we are freed from sin with newness of life, which will be fully completed and revealed when Christ returns for us and all believers in Him.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, please don't forget this! There's a reason God continually offers this identity protection plan. The threats around us are real! While we might not always see them or realize how much danger really exists, our God does, and He wants to be the One who guards you from them through His baptismal identity protection plan! This gift of God is not something worth passing on, and it's certainly not something worth forgetting about once God delivers it.

Remember your Baptism often! The things this gift is designed to protect you from aren't going to let up once you've been baptized! Sin, death and the devil are constantly prowling around, and your baptized life is a quick and frequent target in their crosshairs. But know this: what your enemies—God's enemies—see as a target, truly is the right plan for you that can withstand any attack that sin, death and the devil can bring.

Don't throw away God's identity protection plan for you. Don't live a life that refuses the work and plan God personally delivers to you. There's no better plan available. Nothing else in this world can protect you as fully, completely, or eternally as God's baptismal plan. Jesus staked His life on it! He rose to guarantee it! This is the identity protection plan for you. It is for you and for your family, for infants and adults, for the genius and the simple, for the family of faithful stalwarts and the family of struggling believers. His identity protection plan is for all people.

So as 2021 has begun and the desires to look for plans to remake one's identity fill your heart or the heart of someone you know, I urge you to start the search with God's baptismal identity protection plan. There's no startup cost. Many of you already have it, and if you don't, we can make sure you do soon. Put it to use by exploring God's Word that reminds you of the fullness of the protection He provides in this plan and the stable identity He gives to you. Let God's baptismal plan for you anchor you so that you aren't tempted to make changes that would undermine the protection He's committed to providing for you.

And if you find that you have already picked a plan that ignores and refuses God's protection plan or know someone else who has, stop the plan! Cancel it! Don't continue to pay so dearly, so eternally, for something that isn't built to last. God's plan is always right there for you to cling to once again. God longs to pour the benefits of His plan into your life again. It's not too late. For He who can bring something from nothing can also begin a new creation in you, too!

I pray that each of you receives and remains on God's baptismal protection plan. It is cost-effective for you. It is the most complete coverage around for you and your family. It has the Jesus guarantee! Baptized into Christ, you are a child of God with whom He is pleased. May God's baptismal plan always bring you forgiveness for your mistakes, self-worth because He wants you to be His no matter how ugly you've lived, and hope that sin's effects on your life are defeated in Christ Jesus and will not last forever. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Sheaffer