

1st Sunday After Epiphany – The Baptism of Our Lord
January 10, 2021
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Salvation for the Whole Family

Acts 16:25–34 (NIV84)

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" ²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.

Dear Friends in Christ,

We have entered a season of light, the part of the church year called Epiphany. The Light of the World enlightens us with the knowledge of himself. As we began last week, we continue to get to know Jesus better during the season of Epiphany. Today's lesson from Acts tells us how we first came to know and believe in Jesus as our Savior. In the next weeks we will get to know Jesus better as listeners and followers and discerners of the truth. Today, we rejoice in the way the Lord brought us to the knowledge of salvation. This salvation is by faith alone and it is for the whole family.

Salvation is By Faith Alone

The account for us to consider this morning is familiar to many. Perhaps the most used and known portion is when the jailer asked Paul and Silas, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" And we know the answer Paul and Silas gave, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.*"

These verses alone show the amazing way the Lord brought one man, the jailer, to salvation. But when we go back just a little bit, we see even more how the Lord worked to bring this jailer to faith. It began when Paul and Silas began preaching in Philippi. This was a Roman city without much of a Jewish presence. It does not seem like there was a synagogue for Paul to go to first as he usually did. As they preached, a slave girl with an evil spirit followed them. Paul eventually casts out the evil spirit and the girl is healed. You would think that this was a wonderful thing. However, the evil spirit enabled the girl to in some way tell the future and her owners made lots of money from her fortune telling. When you interrupt someone's money making plans, they often get upset. These men did and got the local government to lock up Paul and Silas.

After Paul and Silas were whipped and beaten, the jailer obediently locks them in the inner part of the jail and fastens their feet in stocks. Paul and Silas did good things that day and were rewarded with beating and imprisonment. God was working through all of this to bring salvation to the jailer. Paul and Silas may not have known God's plans but they trusted that their Lord was good and right in what was happening. How can we know this?

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Even in this horrible situation, they were proclaiming the wonders of God in song to the other prisoners. Then comes the miraculous earthquake that opens the doors of the prison and breaks free the chains that held the prisoners. They are free, but Paul and Silas do not flee. There is still opportunity to proclaim the gospel to the jailer and save both his physical life and give him eternal life through Christ. The jailer was ready to kill himself before the Romans killed him for allowing his prisoners to escape, but the prisoners had not run away.

The relieved jailer asks the question that every false religion and many even among visible Christianity answer incorrectly. “What must I do to be saved?” Implied in the question is that the person must do something to be saved. False religions will give you steps toward enlightenment and pillars to accomplish and rules to follow to do what is needed to be saved. Of course, no sinner could ever accomplish even these man made rules perfectly. Mormons try to imitate true Christianity by saying that you are saved by grace....after all that you can do. You give it your best and God will do the rest is another false way of teaching what one must do to be saved. My best is always stained with sin and like a filthy rag in God’s sight.

Yet, within visible Christianity, there are those who claim that there is a little good in everyone. You just have to fan that spark of goodness into flame within yourself and then God will come to you and help you finish. Some claim that God gives one faith which gives you the power to accomplish the good works required for salvation. So they say you must believe and be good in order to be saved. Others boldly claim that an unbeliever has to make a choice to believe in Jesus as if a dead in sin unbeliever has any ability to make such a choice.

The answer from Paul and Silas is simple and makes it clear to the jailer and to all that there is nothing for us to do to be saved. Salvation is by faith alone. “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.” How wonderful that is for us too! Jesus has done all the works necessary for us to be saved. He kept God’s law perfectly. He obeyed his Father’s will always. He suffered and died to pay for all our sins. There is nothing left for us to do to complete our salvation. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. Trust, faith in Jesus is all we need and that itself is a gift of the Holy Spirit. You are saved through faith in Christ, but this salvation was not just for the jailer and not just for you. Salvation is for the whole family.

Salvation is For the Whole Family

In that very familiar part of this text, we often end the quote after “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved...” But their answer is not finished. Listen to the final verses of this account and notice how many times Luke records that this salvation is for the whole family.

They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” ³² *Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to **all the others in his house.*** ³³ *At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and **all his family** were baptized.* ³⁴ *The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he **and his whole family.***

So who is included in this jailer’s family? The Bible does not tell us. Maybe the jailer had infants and toddlers running around at home. Maybe he had teens and tweens who were excited to be up past midnight. He likely had a wife and maybe her parents were living with them, or perhaps his parents. We don’t know the exact make up of the family. But we don’t need to know that because what we know is amazing. No one in the family is left out of the salvation Jesus brings. No one

is excluded from the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus. No one misses out on the promise of eternal life.

Think of the families in our congregation. Think of the families you know in your communities. There are some with mom and dad and 2.5 kids. There are single parent families, blended families, empty nesters, singles, widows and widowers. No matter what they make up of the household, God wants that entire household to be saved. That is why we love children in church. Salvation through faith in Jesus is for everyone. I know, kids make noise and there is a time to take them out of the sanctuary to calm them so that others can hear. But bring them back soon. I know there are little ones sitting around the screens at home watching the service with parents. I'm sure the little ones don't pay attention for the entire service and instead want to play or do something else. Parents, keep doing what you are doing to bring your children to Jesus. His salvation is for the whole family.

How exactly is it that God brought the jailer's whole family to faith in Christ that night? *Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.*

Paul and Silas proclaimed the word of the Lord to all of them and baptized all of them. We call this the means of grace, the gospel in word and sacrament. God promises to work faith only through these means. So we proclaim the message of Christ and we baptize. Those who are baptized are connected with Christ and all he has done. Christ was baptized in order to take our place under God's law and fulfill it perfectly for us. Christ was baptized to take our place under the wrath of God and be punished on the cross for our sins so we are forgiven. Our baptism clothes us with Christ's righteousness and washes away all our sins. Therefore we continue to teach the word of God to the baptized so we are continually connected and reminded that we belong to Christ and are part of his family now.

Christmas is a time of joy because our Savior has been born for us. Epiphany continues to be a time of joy as we get to know Jesus better. The jailer rejoiced that night of the earthquake. *He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.* We rejoice like the jailer whenever an individual or whole family is brought into God's family through baptism and whenever God's Word is taught. For salvation is for the whole family.

Amen.