

⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

In the name of our Lord Jesus, dear friends,

I certainly do not mean to sound disrespectful or blasphemous, but I used to think that our text for today was full of weirdness. What I mean is, I didn't understand a lot about it. As a kid, I thought it was weird that Jesus needed to be baptized. I thought it was weird that a regular ol' sinful guy like John got to baptize God's Son. I wondered what John said as he baptized Jesus, "*I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of...well...YOU, and of the Holy Spirit*"? I didn't know! I just didn't understand it too well. Maybe after hearing the gospel today, you have some questions also. God's Word will give us some answers today and we have the opportunity to review what Baptism is as we compare

OUR BAPTISM AND CHRIST'S

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| 1. OURS ACKNOWLEDGES SIN; HIS FULFILLS ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS | (4-5) |
| 2. OURS CONFESSES FAITH; HIS SHOWS THAT HE IS THE SAVIOR | (9-11) |
| 3. OURS MAKES US GOD'S CHILDREN; HE IS GOD'S SON | (10-11) |

One of the reasons we may have a little trouble understanding Jesus' baptism is that we know that God says that we are baptized to remove our sins. In what we call the Great Commission, Jesus commanded his disciples: ***Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:20).*** As Jesus' disciples today, we also are to go to all people. All people need baptism because all people are sinful. God sent a believer named Ananias to take this message to the Apostle Paul at the time of his conversion: ***And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away (Acts 22:16).*** Peter explained to those gathered to hear him at Pentecost: ***Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).***

If you pressed me to explain how baptism works, I couldn't do it. Neither can you. We don't know how simply applying the water and saying those words, ***in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*** can give faith (the gift of the Holy Spirit) and take someone's sins away. Maybe you've even thought, "*That sounds like magic or hocus-pocus! How can a little water do that?*" Well, Martin Luther, in his Catechism, posed that very question: ***How can water do such great things?*** And this is how he answered that question:

It is certainly not the water that does such things, but God's Word which is in and with the water, and faith which trusts this Word used with the water. For without God's Word the water is just plain water and not Baptism. But with this Word it is Baptism. God's Word makes it a washing through which God graciously forgives our sin and grants us rebirth and a new life through the Holy Spirit.

For Christians who simply hear what God says in his Word and trust it because *it is* God's Word, we do not even have to attempt an explanation. Baptism holds that kind of power because God says it does. How it can do those great things is one of the mysteries of God that the Bible talks about. Not only is it okay for there to be some things that we as human beings can't fully comprehend or explain, it's going to be that way whether we like it or not! We are not God; we are not all-knowing. He knows how it works and what he accomplishes through it. So the faithful Christian simply stands in awe of God and is thankful that he provides a *Means of Grace* like Baptism through which he *does* take our sins away and gives faith!

Okay, so maybe most of us accept that part. But why did *Jesus* have to be baptized? If baptism is for the forgiveness of sins, why Jesus? He was not sinful; Scripture makes that abundantly clear. In one place the Bible says of Jesus: ***For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin (Hebrews 4:15).*** John the Baptist knew this about Jesus and so we find him flabbergasted when the sinless Savior came to him to be baptized! John even had the kind of questions you and I have. Today's gospel doesn't include all the events of Jesus' baptism. The other three gospel writers all say something about it in their writing. Matthew records this: ***Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me (3:14)?"***

Jesus' answer to him, again found in Matthew's gospel, is very important: ***Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented (3:15).*** Jesus told him to baptize him right then because it was proper in God's eyes and it would ***"fulfill all righteousness"***.

There was an expectation of God that sinners would be baptized by John. Jesus, the One who bore all people's sin as he lived, identified with sinners and underwent baptism. Both John and Jesus had a part in doing what was proper. But it seems that the baptism of Jesus and the fulfilling of all righteousness meant something more than that. Jesus received the benefit and blessing of the Holy Spirit in his baptism. This allowed him to go forth in his public ministry, right after this, to truly—in every sense of God's plan and expectation—fulfill all righteousness! He would continue living a perfect life, starting with combatting the Devil's temptations in the desert and ending three years later with his sufferings and death.

Our comfort in witnessing Jesus' baptism today, is remembering that Jesus fulfilled all righteousness. As he prepared to spend the next three years bringing that work to completion, he underwent baptism and derived real benefit and blessing from it, just as we do. While our sins are forgiven in baptism—and that makes it different than Jesus' baptism, we do receive the gift of the Holy Spirit like Jesus did, which allows us to live righteous lives also. We see the grace of God bestowed on Christ as he began his earthly ministry, much like we see the grace of God bestowed upon us in baptism.

Another *difference* between our baptism and Christ's is that OURS CONFESSES FAITH IN GOD and HIS SHOWS THAT HE IS THE SAVIOR.

For us, faith is obvious and evident at our baptism. Although some would argue, God gives faith even to little infants as they are baptized. There is nothing in all of Holy Scripture that says or even hints that children should not be baptized. There's nothing even remotely close! But what we do hear from God's Word are these things: that all people are sinful from conception, all sinful people need God's forgiveness, and we are to go to all nations and baptize. Nations are made up of people, including babies. Whole families were baptized according to Scripture. Jesus himself said ***"Let the little children come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these (Matt. 19:14)."*** And the psalmist writes that ***God has ordained praise from the lips of children and infants (Psalm 8:2).*** It is sinful foolishness to believe that little ones cannot have faith. And when we consider that baptism is a gift of God to us and not something we must decide to do for God, we know that God can give his gifts of faith and forgiveness even to little babies.

The miracle of faith is 100% a gift of God and not something we have the power to decide or create. God grants that faith to even the smallest child in baptism. Listen again to Acts 2:38, but now we'll add the following, verse 39 as well: ***Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.*** Baptism is for forgiveness, gives the gift of faith, and is also for children.

Now certainly babies do not confess their sins or faith prior to baptism. But the act of baptism itself is a confession to all those who see it or hear about it. It is a confession spoken by the pastor and attested to by parents and witnesses that faith does now indeed exist in this little child.

Adults are a different story. Usually—and some of you know this from experience—it happens that adults learn what God says about baptism, namely the gifts God gives in baptism and how he wants all people to be baptized, and then *they want to be* baptized. That desire flows from their faith and becomes a confession of their faith in God.

Baptism for Jesus was obviously a little different. Jesus had no need to have faith created in him—he is God. Jesus had no need to confess his faith. But his baptism did show that he was the Savior. Listen again to what happened: ***As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; in you I am well pleased.”*** Heaven was torn open. The Holy Spirit descended and the voice of God the Father was heard. All three persons of the Trinity—Father, Son & Holy Spirit—were present. God declared Jesus to be his Son, the Savior.

With this event, the one true God, launches the climax of his great plan of salvation. All the waiting, all the preparation, all the holding back until just the proper time is now over. The Savior of the world is ready to begin his most serious part of his work of redemption. The most momentous days this earth will ever experience—the 3 years of Christ's ministry—are about to commence. Jesus would now walk the land of Israel preaching, teaching, calling to repentance and faith in him, healing, helping, leading people to God. It would finally end in his cruel sufferings and torturous death only to be followed by his glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven!

Oh, this baptism was no empty ceremony that Jesus simply had to go through because God expected it! As God reveals his Son at his baptism, he propels Jesus into the working out of our salvation! It showed that he was indeed the Savior of the world.

And now, back to us and our baptisms, just one more time. The special gifts of forgiveness and faith that come through baptism mean that the baptized person is a child of God. So that we might have this comfort, God had Paul write to the Galatians: ***You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (3:26-27).*** By our baptism we are clothed with Christ—God sees us wrapped up in his Son. That's why God calls all of us—men and women alike—“sons” of God. When God looks at us, he sees his Son wrapped around us! And “sons” of God are the ones who are the heirs, those who will inherit eternal life.

Permit me to read just one more passage on baptism—and I think this is as important a passage as you'll find on the subject. 1 Peter 3:20b-22: ***In (the ark) only a few people, eight in all (Noah's family), were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*** Baptism is not merely a symbolic act, as some believe! No, Peter teaches us that baptism saves—and he repeats it! When we are baptized it is as if we are stamped “property of God.” Sin no longer owns us! Death cannot claim us! The devil

has no hold over us! And even better than “property of God” is that we are his family. We are called children of God, sons of God, brothers and sisters of Christ Jesus himself!

Can there be more wonderful news than to know that we have been made children of God...to know our sins are not counted against us but have been washed away...to know that we have God’s love and care each day...to know that we have salvation through Jesus? These are the greatest things anyone can know! Remembering that we are baptized children of God assures us of these comforts.

Jesus’ baptism did not *make him* God’s child, it PROVED THAT HE WAS GOD’S SON already. The words are clear, ***“You are my Son, whom I love; in you I am well pleased.”*** This was not a new position for Jesus, as some claim. He did not at this point suddenly become God’s Son in the same sense that you and I become God’s children through baptism. He was always God’s Son. We just celebrated Jesus’ birth into this world and no doubt you remember this assurance from God that we heard: ***But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (Galatians 4:4-5).*** Jesus was always God’s Son, from eternity. His baptism is one of those times where God declares it and gives us proof that Jesus IS GOD’S SON.

I hope that considering this account of Jesus’ baptism in light of some other passages of Scripture was a helpful review or brings a better understanding of just what our baptism means for us and why Jesus had to be baptized.

I also hope that we go home today with a renewed appreciation for our own baptism, repenting for any of our misunderstandings about this gift of God or not understanding or appreciating Jesus’ work on our behalf. I pray that you trust in God’s forgiveness for you because of Christ, who fulfilled all righteousness in his baptism and after it until his redeeming work was done.

And finally, we ask the Holy Spirit to *“strengthen (us) to live in (our) baptismal grace all the days of (our lives).”* * Amen.

Now the peace which surpasses all understanding will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.