



Matthew 3:13-17 - ¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵ Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. ¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Baptized into Christ



But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his great mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior. (Titus 3:4-6).

In answer to the simple question, *What does Baptism do for us?* Martin Luther states, *Baptism works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.* Behind that statement lies the full authority of Scripture and God's promise made in several places in the Bible. Baptism works the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation! So maybe you puzzled with John the Baptizer in our gospel lesson for this morning, when Jesus came to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. John was no dummy. He knew who he was as a human being – sure he was the forerunner of the Savior of the world – but John knew that he had been born of sinful parents and was, in fact, a sinner himself. John also knew who Jesus was, to a certain extent. He knew Jesus was a righteous man, one who didn't seem to need the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins that John was offering. And so he protests, **"I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"** Answering his objection, Jesus simply said, **"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."** And that was that. Jesus' word was good enough for John, but we still might wonder what's going on here in the Jordan River. Why was Jesus baptized?

Jesus was baptized because we needed him to be baptized. In our Old Testament lesson, the prophet Isaiah pointed ahead to a special person – he called him the Servant of the Lord. This Servant would be anointed by the Holy Spirit and would bring justice, healing, and righteousness to the world. In our second lesson, the apostle Peter pointed back to a special person, Jesus, who was anointed by the Holy Spirit and with power. And here, in Matthew 3, we see Isaiah's prophecy and Peter's preaching point straight to Jesus as the promised Servant of the Lord, the Savior of the world. **As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.** At his baptism, Jesus was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit – marking the beginning of his public work as the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world.

OK, granted. Jesus was baptized and anointed with the Holy Spirit to set him apart for the special work of salvation. But there's still something that doesn't seem to add up. Why was Jesus baptized? The baptism that John was offering was a baptism of repentance, turning away from sin, for the forgiveness of sins - and Jesus didn't have any sin...or did he? Jesus was baptized as our substitute. He took all the sins of the world upon himself. He made our burden his burden. Jesus' baptism was a baptism of repentance, just as John preached – not repentance for his own sins, but for ours. Jesus' baptism was a baptism for the forgiveness of sins – not forgiveness for his own sins, but for ours. Jesus came to identify with sinners. He came to take the place of sinners. **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.** With his baptism, Jesus continued on his path to the cross of Calvary, where he would sacrifice his perfect life to pay for our sinful lives. So, there he was, standing on the banks of the Jordan River, fulfilling all righteousness for you and for me. In his baptism, Jesus, the holy and righteous Son of God, was united with sinners so that we, sinners, are united with the holy and righteous Son of God in our baptism.

When Jesus was baptized, Matthew tells us, **At that moment, heaven was opened...and a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.** When you were baptized, picture this same reality. The gates of heaven were thrown open before you, as God the Father reached his hand into the dark abyss that was your life and pulled you out, calling you by name. He made you his child in baptism, he threw wide open the gates to heaven before you in your baptism, he adopted you as his child and heir in your baptism. How is all of this possible? Because of Christ, and his work on your behalf. How is all this possible? Because of the promise of God that **all of you who are baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.** And again, **Don't you**



know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

That is baptism's promise for you today. In the Sacrament of Baptism, God intimately and powerfully connects you with Jesus and everything he's done. Consider how profound that is – Jesus' perfect life is now my perfect life of obedience to God. Jesus' death on Calvary's cross is my death to sin. Jesus' resurrection from death to life, is my resurrection. I am his and he is mine, what a beautiful truth!

But what about when things don't seem to be going too perfectly in my life? What happens when I can't seem to kick the habit, or keep impure thoughts out of my mind? What happens when the devil comes calling and I give in to temptation? Remember your baptism. You might be thinking, *"But how? My baptism was so long ago and every day I struggle to be what God has made me to be!"* Here's the trick: Go back to your baptism and live your baptism every day. Don't say "I was baptized," but "I AM baptized!" Did you know that the Christian Emperor Constantine, who ruled the Roman Empire in the 4th century, held off on being baptized until he was on his death bed because he thought that baptism only forgave sins up to that point? That was a misunderstanding of baptism – God doesn't just want you to die having been baptized, but to live your baptism every day!

Because of the baptism of Christ, God can now look down upon each of his children and say this exact same thing about you – You are my beloved son, beloved daughter; because of Christ, I am well pleased in you. When I look at you, I don't see the ways you've broken my law, I don't call to mind all the ways you've failed me. When I look at you, I see Jesus. When I look at you, I see perfection, and with you I am well pleased. And the beautiful part about that promise of God? He'll never get bored with you! His love makes you beautiful to him. Just like a 90 year old man can look at his wife of 60 years and say, *"You're the most beautiful woman in the world,"* and mean it – so when God looks at you in Christ, he doesn't see you for what you were. He sees you for what his love has made you to be. Are you perfect? No. Am I perfect? No. But Jesus is. Through baptism, God has connected us to Christ and made his perfection our personal possession.

December 7, 1986. It's not a day that I've ever celebrated – but maybe I should. It was on that cold, snowy, December morning in West Allis, WI that this renegade child of hell was brought to the waters of baptism. It was then and there that God claimed me as his child, connecting me to Christ – his death and resurrection, giving me the very perfection he demands. I've celebrated my birthday throughout my life – marking the date that I was born as a sinner into a sinful world. But maybe I should try to put more focus on my *"re-birth date,"* the day when I was raised with Christ and given his righteousness as a spotless robe to wear all of my life. On second thought, maybe it's not such a big deal that I've never gone crazy celebrating December 7, my baptismal date. Because of the baptism of Jesus and the connection made to him in my own baptism, every single day is December 7, 1986. Every single day, you and I get to live and move and have our entire being in Christ – the one came to identify with us sinners, so that we sinners could become the very righteousness of God. Every single day, we get to live in the joy of knowing that we are God's children, remembering our baptisms when his name was spoken over us, connecting us to Christ, making us children of heaven *In the name of the Father and of the Son (+) and of the Holy Spirit.* Amen.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24-25)