**Christ Cleanses the Water**

Based on [Matthew 3:13-17](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt3.13-17)

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Epiphany 1- The Baptism of Our Lord

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Today’s preaching considers two aspects of Jesus’ own baptism. In his baptism,

1. Jesus takes our sinful condition upon himself.
2. Jesus purifies the water for our baptism.

Baptism is the most important moment in a person’s life. Acts 2:38 says, “**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**.” Two things are promised here in Baptism, (1) the forgiveness of sins, and (2) the gift of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus is baptized, the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, like a dove. In baptism, Jesus received the Holy Spirit. **But why does the son of God need the Holy Spirit?** Doesn’t he have the Holy Spirit already? And what about the other promise of Baptism…the forgiveness of sins? Why does Jesus need to be baptized? It's not as if he has any sin that needs to be forgiven, or any transgression that needs to be washed away.

For this reason, John the Baptist was confused when Jesus came to him for baptism. He says, “**I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?**” **What need does the perfect, eternal, holy Son of God have for the things that Baptism gives?...things** like repentance, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit? Does he not already have these things without measure? (John 3:34).

All of this is to set the stage for understanding the purpose of Jesus’ baptism. Because it’s not just a show. In Baptism, Jesus humbles himself by taking our sin upon himself, and he purifies the water for our own baptism.

Jesus baptism is part of his humiliation, his taking on our sinful condition. But the way of the world is to humiliate others and exalt yourself. When I was in Law School, I remember hearing about other students, once they had completed their research assignment in the library, would rip out the page from the book they used. This was so that others in the class wouldn’t be able to complete the assignment and they would get a worse grade. **You see if you're trying to win, to seize success and glory, you have to assert yourself, exalt yourself as better and more qualified than others. One way of doing that is to bring others down, humiliate them, cause them to fail so that you stand taller in comparison.** That is what it means to exalt *yourself*, using your power, your skill, your craftiness, whatever means are at your disposal to elevate yourself above others.

Jesus elsewhere tells a parable about a man who exalts himself…who takes the first seat at the table… and in the end he is humbled and sent to the last. Jesus say to humble yourself and take the last seat and wait to be exalted to the first seat. And see John the baptist does just that: “I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me” In other words, “You deserve the first seat to be the bapizer, and yet you take the last?” And Jesus says, “Let it be so…for it is necessary for us to fulfill all righteousness, it is necessary for me to be take the last seat, born in a manger, raised in Nazareth, trained to be a carpenter, and walking to the Jordan like all other repentant Jews to receive baptism.

The humility of faith is knowing that it is God who exalts and God who humbles. And so when Jesus submits to baptism, he is humbling himself to God’s call. Jesus says to answer John's doubt, "**Let it be so now, for it is fitting to fulfill all righteousness**." In other words, Jesus must number himself with the transgressors, he must share in their sin, he must be baptized as we must be baptized. The water that washes away our sins, is also poured upon the saviour, and he is immersed in our trespasses and guilt.

An illustration. Before running water was a thing, when filling up and heating up a bathtub was not so simple as adjusting a knob on a faucet, families would have to share baths and bathwater and taking turns. Imagine how dirty the water would be for the last person? Or imagine bathing in the same pool with people who dirty the water. Just as one who shares a bath swims in the filth that the water has removed from the body of others, so too Jesus bathes in our bathwater, takes on our filth, our uncleanness, our sin. And as the first, it is not just our sin, but the sin of the whole world. Jesus baptism indicates that he is taking on the role of the saviour, and this begins by his taking on our sinful condition.

But it is not enough for Jesus to take on our sin, we also need to be cleaned and have our sins washed away. And plain water can’t do that, you need water that has been cleaned by Jesus. Another illustration, when you wash your hands for dinner, you don't just use plain water. Yes water can wash away dirt, but water cannot kill the germs, and the bacteria and all the things that will make you sick. You need soap with the water to do that.

Scripture says that when God comes he is like a fuller’s soap and will purify those who will then offer sacrifices to him. When Jesus was baptized, it wasn't to wash away his sins; no he entered the water as the soap, the cleaning agent that purifies the water that we are baptized with. He is the word of God added to the water that kills the bacteria of sin and makes us clean.

In the Rite of Baptism we pray to God confessing this: “Through the Baptism in the Jordan of Your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, You sanctified and instituted all waters to be a blessed flood and a lavish washing away of sin.”

God has planned salvation to happen in this way…that he would take upon our sin, and purify us to offer our lives as a sacrifice to him. Jesus was baptized to die in our place, and to rise again and bring us with him. And having purified the water for our baptism, he made a way to save sinners and prepare them for a weight of glory that is beyond comparison. Baptism...now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and prepared for every good work.