

## **Baptism of our Lord, Year A**

*Matthew 3:13-17*

Jesus began his earthly ministry with baptism. We begin our life in the Church with Baptism. Baptism is a beginning—a new beginning—the start of an awesome adventure with God.

This morning we celebrate “The Baptism of our Lord”. When Jesus left Nazareth and went to Judea to be baptized by John, he was fulfilling the heavenly Father’s will. Just as his circumcision at the age of eight days was part of the requirement of the Law, so now he’s “fulfilling all righteousness” by being baptized by John.

Jesus was without sin. And baptism had not been commanded for the Hebrew people when the covenant was given through Moses. So why did Jesus have to be baptized?

John’s baptism was a “baptism of repentance” as we know from John’s own words. Just before Jesus came to be baptized, in verse 11, John told the Pharisees and Sadducees who had come out to hear him that he baptized “with water for repentance.” He went on to talk about Jesus, “*He who is coming after me.*” John said that “the One who is coming after me” was mightier than he was and that this “mightier One” would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. From these words and John’s insistence in today’s Gospel lesson that he himself needed to be baptized by Jesus, we *know* that Jesus was without sin. Only a person without sin would not need to repent and be washed clean in baptism.

However, when Jesus came to John at the Jordan River, He insisted on being baptized. He said that this was needed “to fulfill all righteousness”. Since Jesus was already righteous, the only reason He would need to be baptized would be if He were standing in for someone else—someone who had sins that needed to be forgiven—for *our* sins! Jesus came to take our sins upon Himself. He could only do this by perfectly fulfilling the Law, something only He could do. Sinless Jesus didn’t need to repent and had no sins to be forgiven. But for our sake, He was willing to humble Himself and take the

sins of all people upon Himself—thus repenting of *our sins* and being baptized *for our sins*.

Of course, John didn't really understand any of this—those around Jesus didn't really understand most of it until after Jesus' death and resurrection. John only knew that he was to be the "voice" that called people to repent of their sins and prepare their hearts to receive the Lord who was coming. He knew who Jesus was when He came for baptism—even when John was a fetus in *Elizabeth's* womb he had recognized Jesus when *He* was a fetus in *Mary's* womb. There was a connection between these two men even before they were born. But the way Jesus started out His ministry was a mystery to John. Why would the Messiah come to be baptized? And yet, because Jesus was "the One"—the Messiah John knew had come in the name of the Lord—he obeyed Jesus' word and baptized Him.

Our Lord Jesus began His ministry in humility and obedience to the will of His heavenly Father, and when He came up out of the water after being baptized, something miraculous and beautiful happened—He received the blessing of His heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit. The voice of the Father thundered from heaven, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,*" at the same moment that the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, descended upon Him. Just as kings in ancient times were anointed and their authority to rule was passed on to them from their fathers, so Jesus is anointed in His baptism and declared Son of God by the Father in heaven. Now He has been given the authority He needs to do the work He was sent to do. *Now* He is ready to begin His ministry.

Jesus' baptism was different from ours. His started out as a typical baptism of repentance, a baptism that was available to anyone who repented of their sins. Such a baptism could be repeated as many times as a person repented. But the blessing of the Father and the Holy Spirit set Jesus apart for His ministry and affirmed His identity as Son of God. Our baptism is a result of Jesus' ministry and work, of His death and resurrection. The apostle Paul says in Romans 6 that we who are "*baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death,*" and that "*we were buried therefore with him by*

*baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” (verses 3-4)*

Our baptism is a “once and for all” baptism that kills the old sinful self and raises a new person, a child of God, from the killing waters of baptism. Our baptism is only possible because our Lord Jesus was willing to humble Himself and come into this sinful world to die for our sins and raise us up to live with Him forever. Just as Jesus, who was God, was willing to humbly obey the will of the heavenly Father, so He calls us to humbly obey His claim on *our lives*. We are not our own, but as Paul says in 1 Corinthians (*chapters 6 & 7*), “we were bought with a price.” The price of our salvation was the death of our Lord Jesus. We belong to Christ Jesus, and we owe Him our allegiance and our obedience.

Today, as we remember today our Lord’s humility and obedience to the Father, may we willingly and joyfully seek to live in obedience to our Lord Jesus, who came to give us new life—life in all its fullness—life for all eternity.

Amen.