

# Matthew 3:13-17

Baptism of our Lord, Epiphany 1, Supplement Series A, January 8, 2016

Theme: Jesus fulfills all righteousness

I. Standing in as our Substitute      II. Receiving full approval

INJ When you choose to go to a game, you do it because you want to be entertained. Maybe the grandchildren are playing, or it is your team, or it is a fun sport. Same thing with movies – you go to be entertained. You choose a restaurant for good food and a friendly atmosphere. You spend your time and energy and money willingly on what you consider valuable. And you will likely eagerly talk about your experience with others. Tell me the highlights of the movie, the game, or the meal, and we will have an interesting conversation.

It doesn't often work that way with church, does it? I do hope you go home and talk about the lessons you heard and the hymns you sang. I pray that you remember at least some of the things I say to you. But our time here is not driven by entertainment. I am not compelled to create an emotional experience to move you to come back to church again.

I know that much of American Christianity has gone that route. I think it leads to what I will call church-lite. Don't talk about hard topics. You might hurt someone's feelings if you mention specific sins. Stay away from controversy and try to put a smile on everyone's face. Church-lite tends to be more about a production or an image or an emotion – more about me. What gets lost is substance and truth – and Jesus.

At St. Luke's we have tried to keep the focus on Jesus. I know we each have different reasons why we come for worship – some better and some worse. But when we get here, we hear what Jesus has done for us. He exposes our guilt. He did the hard work to forgive sin. He is a Savior for us when times are dark and it is no fun and I don't know what to do next. Jesus is not church-lite. His message moves us to devote our time and our energy and our money in thanksgiving for God's mercy. Today, we see Jesus at his baptism. He doesn't entertain us, but he is accomplishing our salvation. It is difficult Bible History, so we watch in awe: Jesus fulfills all righteousness. He stands in as our Substitute, and he receives full approval.

Matthew records that Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John. This is the first information we have about Jesus since he was a boy. Matthew last told us the child Jesus had returned from Egypt with his family. Luke relates the trip to the temple when Jesus was 12. Now Jesus is an adult, 30 years old. He came to John the Baptist to be baptized.

This event marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Up until

this time, Jesus was quietly going about his life, learning and growing. After his baptism, Jesus would face Satan's direct attacks head on. He would gather his disciples and teach them. He would perform miracles and preach. He would butt heads with the Pharisees and lay down his life on the cross.

We might feel the urge to ask, "What was Jesus doing before his baptism?" The short answer is, "We don't know. The Bible doesn't say." A more complete answer is this: Jesus was completely and perfectly obeying his Father's will. Jesus was born under the law so that he could keep it for us. For thirty years to this point, everything – his thoughts, his actions, his desires, his goals – all perfectly matched the Father's. This is an important truth: We need a Savior who has kept the law for us. Jesus has.

Jesus' baptism marks a new phase of his saving work. He continued to keep the law, but now he would publicly take on his enemies and speak God's words to defeat them. He would walk to the cross and endure the curse of God for the sin of the world. The Baptism of our Lord is recorded so we begin to note Jesus' passive obedience, his suffering in our place.

Jesus' baptism is an interesting scene. Jesus came to John the Baptist. John was the forerunner, preparing the way for the Messiah, proclaiming "Repent! The kingdom of God is near." The Christ was imminent, for John said "One is coming whose sandals I am unworthy to untie." John would decrease in power, but he would increase. John baptized with water, but the Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit. John said Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Now Jesus comes to John to submit to his baptism? This was all wrong from John's point of view. If Jesus is greater; if Jesus is worthy of honor; if Jesus is perfect and God himself; then John should not presume to stand over him and baptize him. John should kneel before the Messiah and humbly receive his baptism with the Holy Spirit. John tried to deter Jesus.

I can imagine the argument John put up. It doesn't look good for Jesus to kneel before John. The Pharisees would never see his greatness if he did that. It would look like John was the leader and Jesus was a follower. The grand, powerful image that would impact the people emotionally is just the opposite! John should be baptized by Jesus.

I picture Jesus listening patiently before he opened his mouth. He spoke as the one who commanded at creation, and it was so. He spoke as the one with all authority, giving a command to John. "Let it be so now." "Do it!" Not in anger or frustration, but in love, Jesus cut through all the objections. This must be done "to fulfil all righteousness."

What does he mean – "to fulfil all righteousness"? Jesus had been fulfilling righteousness his entire life by keeping the law for us. Now he

would also face the opposition of sinful men and the direct attacks of Satan. He would fulfil the promises of God that described him as the Suffering Servant, the one despised and rejected by men, whom we did not esteem, and on whom God has laid the sins of the world. Jesus was humbled. He completely took from us all our guilt, and he supplied us with his holiness. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness.

Submitting to Jesus' command, John baptized him in the Jordan. There, Jesus identified himself publicly with you and me. He stands in our place, shouldering the burden of our sins. He promises to remove them forever! Jesus fulfils all righteousness by standing in as our Substitute.

The scene of Jesus getting wet in the river, setting his face against his enemies, submitting himself to the grueling path that led to the cross — it is not church-lite. It is not feel-good emotions. It is not a call to action that now you should get up and do something just like Jesus. Jesus' baptism is sobering and serious. Jesus willingly stands in our place because we are sinners. All the attention is on our Substitute, not on us. He is doing what we cannot. He is giving us just what we need. God gives peace to your troubled soul. Look at what your Savior does for you! By fulfilling all righteousness, Jesus forgives your sin.

I realize that when people think of church, they don't often think of the message that Jesus humbled himself and did all the nitty-gritty details as our Substitute. They look for a stage and a message of prosperity and a feeling of empowerment. We don't have it here — are we missing out? Should we seek a slick image and a popular message? Look again at the lesson before us. The Triune God revealed himself spectacularly at Jesus' baptism. He gave his full approval to Jesus. You can be sure that he has fulfilled all righteousness for you. "After Jesus was baptized, he immediately went up out of the water. Suddenly, the heavens were opened for him! He saw the Spirit of God, descending like a dove and landing on him and a voice out of the heavens said, 'This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him.'"

When Jesus stood up after his baptism, he saw a wondrous sight. The Father and the Holy Spirit revealed themselves with him, testifying to the Triune nature of God. This is the God of Scripture, the God who saves, the God we worship: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Three persons; one God.

The Holy Spirit descended like a dove and landed on Jesus. This is why we usually picture the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. I don't know if you ever noticed, but the last window on the side of the church shows the Holy Spirit as a dove. He is holding the tongues of fire from Pentecost. But the form is not the important thing. What the Spirit did is significant. Peter

says that Jesus was "anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power."

In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed to set them apart for their office. Oil was poured over them as a sign that they were qualified and approved to serve. Jesus now was anointed, not with oil, but with the Holy Spirit. He was set apart publicly as the Christ/Messiah. Those titles, "Christ" and "Messiah," mean "the anointed one." Jesus has been set apart by God and publicly presented as the world's Redeemer.

The Holy Spirit strengthened Jesus for the work ahead of him. Jesus is true God. He has all power because he is God, but he humbled himself to be our brother. In his weakness, he needed the Spirit's strength. With the Spirit's encouragement and testimony, Jesus, the God-man, faced all opposition for us. And he won the victory for us.

The Father also made his presence known. The voice spoke from the heavens: "This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him." Here is the First Person of the Trinity. The Father revealed himself also to encourage and support Jesus. Who is this person who has just been baptized by John? Not just some preacher. Not a magician or a trickster. God himself. "My Son." Not some cast off or reject, but the one who is loved by the Father. "Whom I love." Not someone who has messed up and now has to make up for his wrongs. "I am well pleased with him." Jesus has done everything well, perfectly obeying the law for us. He is the Holy One, the Christ, our Savior. God approves of him. We can put our full confidence in him.

This is not church-lite entertainment. Who can fathom the mystery of the Trinity? What does it take to understand that Jesus is fully God, and also fully human? He loved us so much that he took our place to fulfil all righteousness. These great concepts are placed before us because they make our salvation sure. This is the only way sinners can have heaven. Any good things we attempt are not good enough. How we feel about it doesn't really matter. Look at Jesus! He has full approval and authority to lay down his life for us. He fulfils all righteousness. Aren't you glad you have seen him?

It seems like such a simple thing: Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized by John. It is not a trivial event, but is packed with confidence for you to take home with you. The Triune God revealed himself. The Christ declared himself. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness. The Church rejoices to see its Savior. We come to worship week after week for the good stuff: To see our Substitute who did more than just talk. He died. And rose. We come to repent and to be strengthened with power-packed words: You are forgiven. You have peace with God. We willingly come to give thanks with our time and energy and our money. We have seen Jesus, our Savior. SDG Amen.