

On this first Sunday of a New Year, the celebration of The Baptism of Our Lord, have you ever wondered why Jesus was baptized at all? I mean, if you have been in worship here with any regularity over the past month and past years, you've heard that John was baptizing people *'for the repentance of sins.'* On December 10th we read from the first chapter of Mark's Gospel account~~~ *'John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.'* [Mk. 1:4] When people went to John at the Jordan River, they came to acknowledge their sinfulness and their subsequent baptism marked the beginning of their new life and leaving sin behind.

Yet, Hebrews 4:15 tells this about Jesus/ *'We have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.'* This fact explains why John the Baptist balked at Jesus' request for baptism. According to the Gospel According to St. Matthew, John said to Jesus: *'I need to be baptized by you, yet you are coming to me?'* [3:14] Jesus never sinned. John was baptizing sinners. So, "Why was Jesus baptized by John in the Jordan River that day long ago?"

Our answer lies in Jesus' response to John's reluctance, namely: *'Allow it for now, for thus it is fitting for us **to fulfill all righteousness.**'* [Mt. 3:15] *To fulfill all righteousness* is why Jesus wanted to be baptized. Some might further remind us that Jesus was not lacking in righteousness, posing the question: 'How could this baptism fulfill all righteousness?' **Wondering Why?**

Moving quickly to the point: Sinless Jesus did not have sins of his own to take down into the Jordan River that day, therefore it could only have been our sins...the sins of the world...that were drowned beneath those flowing waters. Certainly no one present that day, nor even in the days and months to come, could have understood this truth. They, and we, would only later on come to understand that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Thus, Jesus' baptism in the Jordan and his dying on the cross go inextricably together. He did both for our sins. Jesus spoke prophetically of his passion, as we read in Luke's account: *'There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished.'* [Lk. 12:50] Jesus took our sins upon his water-drenched-body in Baptism and upon his blood-drenched- body on the cross...for you and for me! For our sins...not for his own!

May we recall the promise the Angel Gabriel spoke to the bewildered Joseph, that this child conceived in Mary's womb *'shall save his people from their sins.'* [Mt. 1:21] Only one who is sinless is capable of fulfilling this angelic assurance. In being baptized, Jesus is not being cleansed from sin, as is true for you and me. In being baptized, Jesus is fulfilling all the criteria of the righteous life. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes it clear that he is the consummation of the Old Testament Law, saying *'Don't think that I came to destroy the law and the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill.'* [Mt. 5:17] Contrary to what many mistakenly argue, Jesus doesn't do away with the Old Testament...Jesus fulfills everything described and required within the Old Testament!

Jesus was baptized, just as he commissioned his earthly Church to baptize, saying *'Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'* God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is what we call The Trinity...3 in 1...and we dare not miss the presence of The Trinity at the moment of Jesus' baptism~~~God, the Son, is baptized...God, the Holy Spirit, descends upon Jesus in the appearance of a dove...and God, the Father, speaks words of great joy from the heavens. This is celebration of Jesus' baptism and this is the celebration of ours!

The earthly ministry of Jesus of Nazareth is inaugurated with his baptism by John. But, let us be clear on what the baptism of Jesus was not. Not a baptism of repentance, for Jesus was sinless. Not the moment Jesus becomes the Son of God, for Jesus is called Immanuel, 'God with us', and as we sing: *'Jesus, Lord at Thy birth...Jesus, Lord at Thy birth.'* The baptism of Jesus is not like our baptism. Jesus is righteous. We are not. Jesus, before his baptism, is the Son of God. We become God's children through Holy Baptism. We are baptized precisely because of **our** unrighteousness and Jesus was also baptized for precisely this same reason!

The Gospel of John tells us that when John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching him in the Jordan River, he proclaimed: *'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.'* [Jn. 1:29] It is incredible that John identifies Jesus as *'the Lamb of God'* and that it is Jesus who *'takes away the sin of the world'*! Through Jesus' baptism and our acceptance of his 2-word-invitation *'Follow me'*, we see fulfilled the words written by St. Paul: *'For him who knew no sin, God made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'* [2 Cor. 5:21]

In short, everything Jesus did, Jesus did for us...he came to earth, was born of a virgin, baptized by John, preached the good news of God's love, loved his enemies, died on the cross, was raised from the grave, ascended into heaven, today prepares a place for believers, and some day will come again to take us to that place. In case you were wondering...That's why Jesus was baptized!

Amen.