

The Text: Mark 1:4-11

Baptism is for sinners. In Baptism God forgives sins. Even the baptism of John in the wilderness granted forgiveness, even though it was not done in God's trinitarian name. The gift of forgiveness by washing attracted the people of God to the Jordan.

They came to see John the Baptist; the wild man they had heard about. They came to hear him preach about God's coming kingdom. Many repented and were baptised in preparation for the coming Christ.

That is why John came: to prepare the way for the Messiah. Like everyone else who went out to see and hear John, Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan. But why? He had no need to repent. As the holy Son of God and had no sin to confess. Why did Jesus submit Himself to John's baptism for sinners?

Jesus kept the Law for us.

By standing in the waters of the Jordan River Jesus identified Himself with us: with our sin and guilt, with our struggle to overcome temptation, with the judgment we feel because of our sins, with our need for God's forgiveness. The eternal holy Son of God takes on human flesh and at His baptism He takes on the sin of humanity.

He kept God's command spoken through John to repent and be baptised, not because He needed forgiveness; but because we do. All people need God's grace and Jesus comes to earn that forgiveness for us by His obedience to the Father.

Everything Jesus did was for us. He didn't need to go to the temple to worship the Father; He was God. He didn't need to read the Scriptures, He authored them. He didn't need to pray; He is the reason God answers our prayers. He could have called on ranks of angels to save Him from the torture of His scourging and crucifixion; but no. Jesus kept all the words of God perfectly. He loved God with all His heart, soul, body, mind and strength, and His neighbour as Himself, and He did it to bring you salvation.

Jesus was the ideal believer in God. Jesus is what we are meant to be. He is fully human. We are fully human too, but we are not what God created us to be. We are born disfigured with sin. We are dead because of sin. Jesus is what we were created to be. He is faultlessly obedient to the Father, extravagantly loving to sinners, deeply compassionate for the ill, and He serves others even unto death. Compared to Jesus, we are weak and selfish, and our weakness and selfishness shows itself in all kinds of ways. Yet Christ did not come to show us up by His holy living or condemn us. He came to rescue. He came to save us. He came to give us life and recreate us by dying for us, rising for us, and giving us His life in baptism.

In obedience to God's command and for our benefit Jesus was baptised by John in the River Jordan. After His baptism, He received the greatest praise from the Father.

The heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended from the skies fulfilling the words of the prophet Isaiah, which Jesus would soon proclaim about Himself. *“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD’S favour” (Isa 61:1, 2).*

Jesus’ baptism marked the beginning of His ministry to bring the kingdom of God to Israel through the preaching and teaching of God’s Word. Jesus fulfilled the words of Isaiah. He brought freedom from sin and death to the world. The Father spoke to the Son from heaven saying, *“You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.”*

Jesus had done everything the Father had sent Him to do. He kept the Law perfectly. When Herod threatened His life as an infant Jesus did not call on the angels to save Him, but entrusted His life into His Father’s hands, believing he would bring about His purposes in Him. When Joseph and Mary visited Jerusalem, the young Jesus spent His time in the temple courts, near God the Father, and listening to the teachers of the Law discuss the Word of God. Now, as a grown man, Jesus submits Himself to a baptism that is for sinners. God the Father is pleased with everything the Son had done.

Jesus rose from the waters of the Jordan and went on His way, but not to return to the carpenter’s workshop in Nazareth. He began His walk to the Cross. He would travel the roads and byways of Palestine, preaching about the grace of the kingdom of heaven. He would teach the Law in a way that would cut through the pretence and façade of sinners who seek to hide their sinful thoughts, words and actions. He reached out to love and heal the desperate, the lonely, the ill, the outcasts, the dead. He would endure threats, suffering and abuse for speaking the truth. And when His time came, Jesus would submit His body to the executioner’s nails.

From the day of His baptism Jesus would have no home, only the companionship of His closest disciples; and they weren’t loyal. He would make a home in the hearts of all who believed in Him. All those who heard His words and trusted in Him, whose bodies were healed, sins forgiven, touched by His compassion, they would become His home.

Your heart also has become a home for Christ. He entered there in your baptism. He continues to live there by faith. Christ in you in a mystery, but the forgiveness and healing He grants is no secret.

By submitting His sinless body to baptism, Jesus showed sinners that they are not to reject baptism in the Trinitarian name. Baptism is not a human idea. Neither is it an accessory to the Christian faith that one goes through when they feel right about it. Jesus’ commands sinners to be baptised saying, *“Unless one is born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven” (Jn 3:5).*

Baptism is not us showing God we are obedient to Him by being baptised. That would make baptism a work we do to prove our faith to God, and not pure grace as the Scriptures proclaim. Baptism is God's work in us. He saves us through water and the Word by connecting us to Jesus. And if we are part of Christ, we are forgiven and holy, and that is why we love God—because He first loves us.

Jesus commands all nations be baptised and children are part of all nations. Babies are sinners too. They need God's grace given in Baptism to be saved. God wants all people to become His adopted children and know Him as their loving Father.

At Jesus' baptism the three persons of the Holy Trinity were present: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Trinity was at your baptism too. As the water was poured over your head the name of God was spoken. God gave Himself to you. The Son was present to grant you the benefits of His cross – forgiveness, life, and salvation. The Spirit was present to make it a washing of grace and an adoption into heaven's family. The Father was there declaring to the heavens: *"You are my beloved child, with you I am well pleased."*

And all this is still working and active in your life to this day. God is still at work through His Word to grant you forgiveness, take away your sins and remind you that you are still God's precious child. He is at work now to shape you into the likeness of Jesus, even as He sees you as His very own.

Jesus is what it means to be fully human and in your baptism everything that made you an undesirable sinner to God was washed away. The old self was drowned in the font, and you are a new person, you are born again in the likeness of Christ.

At Jesus' baptism the heavens were opened and because of His death and resurrection they remain opened forever to those who are washed in the saving waters of baptism. All those who trust in God's saving Word combined with ordinary water shall enter heaven to the sound of angel's voices joined in praise to God for keeping His Word and saving those who trust in Him.

Jesus shows God's love for us by becoming what we are, that we might become what He is. He became human that we might be made holy. Jesus was baptised for you, taking on sins He had not committed and drowning them in the waters of the Jordan. He was baptised on your behalf, just as He was crucified on your behalf.

Let who God has made you in baptism be the person you strive to be each day. Let God's grace given you in baptism keep you walking in His ways. Return to your baptism each day and drown again the old sinful nature and rise to be a beloved child of the heavenly Father. Amen.