

### ***Message: “For A Good Reason”***

#### **Is Christ part of your life and identity?**

That's what lies at the heart of our lesson for today. Matthew's narrative retelling of Jesus' baptism is brief, yet it reveals a genuineness, depth and connection we don't want to miss.

**If you were to travel from congregation to congregation, you'd find big differences in the way baptism is practiced.** It's not just the differences between denominations, such as the adult believer baptism of the Pentecostal church or Southern Baptist churches. There are Methodists who say baptism without following the specifics of the ritual is improper or even illegal.

**It's telling when we look at Matthew's narrative and see none of the things that normally create division.** There's no indication of the words spoken, the position of the body, the gestures or how water is applied. After John's initial dialog with Jesus, the narrative jumps to Jesus emerging from the water and the divine response. There isn't even time for a picture with pastor!

**Perhaps we've focused too much on the ritual and missed the point of what happened.** Jesus appears on the bank of the river Jordan, waiting to be baptized with those gathered. John is confused.

*“Why are you here to be baptized? I should be baptized by you!”* (v14). John doesn't want to baptize Jesus. He knows Jesus has no need to repent. Baptism, as John understands it, is about repentance. Jesus has done no wrong.

**Jesus' reply is key,** *“Allow me to be baptized now. This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness”* (v15). There's immediacy to the act. Jesus is present “now.” It's not just symbolic. Baptism isn't just repentance. It's about our need for grace and God's willingness to give it. John reluctantly agrees and baptizes Jesus.

**What happens next is amazing!** The Holy Spirit descends in a form like a dove and a voice from heaven (God) speaks. All three persons of God are present: God Almighty, God the Son and God the Spirit. All four gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, record the event. It's pivotal. This act shapes our identity, what we believe, the way we live.

**The voice speaks powerful words,** “*This is my Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life*” (v17, MSG).

**The Son of God was baptized to make things right with God, giving hope to all of humanity.** John was present. He had a front row seat. John was in the water at Jesus’ baptism by the Spirit, participating in a holy act he couldn’t understand. He didn’t get the big picture. But John consented. He was willing. And as a result, John heard the voice. He saw the Spirit. John is a witness to the true gift of baptism.

**What does it mean to us today?** Matthew is showing us. The “now” is important. Now is now! Now is about the identification with humanity, not about the essential nature of the Christ. Jesus was baptized to truly be “God with us.” Jesus is identifying with humanity, showing solidarity for who and what we are – who you are! - God’s children. The rightness he’s fulfilling is the rightness of the mission, making people believe in, and love, God, to embrace the divine.

**Jesus shows us “we can be who we need to be. We can do what we are here to do.”<sup>1</sup>**

**Baptism is an expression of identity and solidarity.** When we’re baptized, we become part of a community of faith. We aren’t alone anymore. We belong to a spiritual family. We’re connected to God and others in a relationship based on trust. We don’t usually think of our faith that way. If we let him, Jesus makes us part of his family. We identify the family as Christians today, but in Jesus’ time they were people who followed “the way.” Rather than money, race, sexual orientation, ability, fame, influence or other aspects, they were people who are, first and foremost, spiritually connected to God. They follow Jesus. We can be the same.

**Yes, there are times, like any family, when disagreements rise.** Conflict happens. The division, separation and differences of opinion are meaningful, but they pale in comparison to what matters most: our relationship with Jesus. When disagreement happens, let’s trust in God, but hold our rituals and traditions lightly. Otherwise, we may find

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<sup>1</sup> GBOD

ourselves in John's situation, consenting and present, but without real understanding of divine grace.

**An illustration comes to mind.** Being baptized without being active in a congregation is like wanting to be fit but never eating healthy or exercising. We can't be part of a community based on faith, hope and love and never demonstrate faith, give others hope or show radical love. It takes our prayers, presence, giving, service and witness. It means using our time, money, energy and commitment. We need to understand what being part of that kind of community means.

**You see, the world wants to isolate us.** We're attacked psychologically every day. The methods are well known: first, get people to speak out against others and then turn against one another. Second, rather than leaning on the trust, caring and acceptance of our group, we focus on the criticism of ourselves. This erodes our support networks. Third is the act of undermining our allegiance to leaders and our organization. Finally, there's withholding positive emotional support.<sup>2</sup> These are tactics used in POW camps. They're also present in social media, TV, radio and our culture. These are practices that steal life. They lead to spiritual numbness and death.

**Jesus came to show us another way to live.** He wants to give us life – here and now! Jesus wants us to know we have a place where we belong. We can be inspired, encouraged, affirmed, loved and cared for. We find a safe place where we can thrive and grow. When we live the way Jesus did, we won't be afraid. We'll find our anxiety dwindling. We'll find peace. We'll be content and fulfilled with our lives as they are. And we'll find joy in God's love, no matter whether it's a good day or a bad day.

**We all want to belong.** We aren't made to be lonely. We're standing with him in the water, knowing we need grace. Our soul craves a connection with the Holy Spirit and our Creator. Baptism and communion provide the spiritual nourishment we need.

**Maybe we've been wrestling with the wrong stuff.** Maybe it isn't about formulas or specific words or rules. Maybe it's about the

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<sup>2</sup> Material drawn from Rath and Clifton, *How Full is Your Bucket?*, Gallup Press, 2004, pp. 19-23

relationship being established, a relationship with the God who pours down grace and a relationship with the community that receives the grace-filled new member of the body of Christ.

**John may have been uncertain, but God didn't hesitate.** God claimed the moment wholeheartedly. The heavens opened, the Spirit descended, and the voice spoke. So who was all that for, the opening of heaven and the voice from heaven? Some would say it was for Jesus, others for John and still others for those gathered.

**I believe the message is for us, here and now.** Matthew recorded this narrative knowing others would read it. He wrote it so we can know Jesus claimed solidarity with us through a baptism of repentance, even though he was without sin. We also know we share in the pleasure of God who claims us as beloved children.

**This is about Jesus, first and foremost.** Jesus is the one we follow, the one we're inviting others to know. It's also about all of us, here and now. I invite you to celebrate! Celebrate baptism, celebrate belonging, celebrate in the knowledge God is well pleased with us. Be thankful, for all are welcome and invited to join us at the feet of our Lord.

*If you feel moved by what we have said, done and experienced today and wish to profess your faith in Jesus, I invite you to come forward now.  
Pray with me ...*

*Jesus, I need you. I open the door of my life and receive you as my Savior and Lord. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of my life. Make me the kind of person you want me to be by your love and grace. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen*

**Isaiah 42:1-9 (CEB)**

But here is my servant, the one I uphold;  
    my chosen, who brings me delight.  
I've put my spirit upon him;  
    he will bring justice to the nations.  
He won't cry out or shout aloud  
    or make his voice heard in public.  
He won't break a bruised reed;  
    he won't extinguish a faint wick,  
        but he will surely bring justice.  
He won't be extinguished or broken  
    until he has established justice in the land.  
The coastlands await his teaching.  
God the LORD says -  
    the one who created the heavens,  
    the one who stretched them out,  
    the one who spread out the earth and its offspring,  
    the one who gave breath to its people  
        and life to those who walk on it -  
I, the LORD, have called you for a good reason.  
    I will grasp your hand and guard you,  
    and give you as a covenant to the people,  
    as a light to the nations,  
    to open blind eyes, to lead the prisoners from prison,  
        and those who sit in darkness from the dungeon.  
I am the LORD;  
    that is my name;  
    I don't hand out my glory to others  
        or my praise to idols.  
The things announced in the past - look - they've already happened,  
    but I'm declaring new things.  
    Before they even appear,  
    I tell you about them.

### **Matthew 3:13-17 (CEB)**

At that time Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River so that John would baptize him. John tried to stop him and said, “I need to be baptized by you, yet you come to me?”

Jesus answered, “Allow me to be baptized now. This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness.”

So John agreed to baptize Jesus. When Jesus was baptized, he immediately came up out of the water. Heaven was opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and resting on him. A voice from heaven said, “This is my Son whom I dearly love; I find happiness in him.”

### **(The Message)**

Jesus then appeared, arriving at the Jordan River from Galilee. He wanted John to baptize him. John objected, “I’m the one who needs to be baptized, not *you!*”

But Jesus insisted. “Do it. God’s work, putting things right all these centuries, is coming together right now in this baptism.” So John did it.

The moment Jesus came up out of the baptismal waters, the skies opened up and he saw God’s Spirit - it looked like a dove - descending and landing on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice: “This is my Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life.”