

## Fulfilling All Righteousness

CP1984

***Matthew 3:13-17 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."***

In our Church Year calendar, the first Sunday after the Epiphany is designated as “**The Baptism of our Lord.**” The Gospel lesson assigned for this day records this familiar event. I would guess that most of the time when you hear this passage, it is in connection with the **Trinity**. This text is the best and clearest example in Scripture of God being three persons. All three persons of the Godhead are present at this event. The Father reveals His presence in a voice, the Spirit is in the form of a dove, and the Son is there physically. Our understanding of the Triune God is greatly influenced by this account.

But our emphasis today is different. We are looking at the Baptism of Jesus and the reason He was baptized. **Consider what you know about Baptism.** It is a washing away of sin. At least, that is what it is for us. But it was different in the case of Jesus—He had no sins that needed to be washed away, so that could not be the reason He wanted to be baptized. So then, think about **the baptism of John**. John did his baptizing before Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Holy Baptism that we have today, Baptism in the name of the Triune God. John’s baptism was different. From the verses just prior to our text, we see that John’s baptism was an outward sign of **repentance**. But Jesus was without sin, so He had no need of repentance. If Jesus did not need to repent and did not need forgiveness, why did He insist on being baptized?

He gives us the answer Himself in the text: ***it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.*** What in the world does that mean, to fulfill all righteousness? That is precisely what Jesus came into the world to do – fulfill all righteousness. By being baptized, He was doing one part of what was necessary for Him to accomplish our forgiveness. Part of His work of redeeming us was to do everything required by God’s Law. When Jesus speaks of fulfilling all righteousness, He is describing what we mean when we say that **He lived a perfect life for us**. And this is important to understand. Jesus would not have been an acceptable payment for the sins of the world if He Himself was sinful. He had to live a life without sin as part of His overall work of salvation.

It is proper to say that **Jesus was baptized for us**. This doesn't mean that He was baptized so that we do not need to be baptized. But He was baptized for our sake. By being baptized, He identified Himself as one of us. You and I are unable to fulfill all righteousness, and therefore deserve death and punishment from God. We must repent of our sins if we want to be forgiven. By going through John's baptism as a show of repentance, even though He did not need to repent, Jesus was associating Himself with all of us who are in need of repentance. He showed that the righteousness He would accomplish in His life is for us.

Another way of understanding this event is to view it as the "**ordination**" of Jesus for His ministry. It was only after His Baptism that His actual ministry began. And at His baptism, he states in no uncertain terms the purpose of His ministry—*to fulfill all righteousness*. His Baptism set Him on a course that would not be complete until He survived the Passion. It meant suffering the judgment against us because of sin. His baptism was His public commissioning for all the world to see. From that moment, He would be doing His Father's business, fulfilling the Father's plan for the world's redemption.

Something crucial to our understanding this event is what is spoken by the Father. We have all heard those words of God the Father: *this is My Son...with him I am well pleased*. But I'm not so sure that we always understand this fully in its context here. This announcement by the Father comes right after Jesus' stated intention to fulfill all righteousness. God is saying that He approves of Jesus fulfilling all righteousness for us! He approves of Jesus doing this work. As a Son, Jesus had the privilege of direct access to the Father. But as the Son of God, He also had an obligation to fulfill. He had to be at His Father's disposal and do the will of His Father at all times. And what was the Father's will? That Jesus do whatever was necessary so that man could be saved from sin. Jesus had to fulfill all righteousness for us.

Earlier in this chapter, John the Baptist had been speaking about *the wrath to come*. That is the punishment that will come to sinful man. This could not be averted unless all righteousness was fulfilled, unless someone led a perfect life and paid for our sins. And that is what Jesus was doing. Through His perfect life, His suffering in our place, and His death for all people, **He was placing Himself between this sinful world and the wrath of God to come**. He put Himself in that position in order to be our shield and protection, the one who would receive the full impact of God's wrath so that we might be spared.

Jesus fulfilled all righteousness because we have not done so and can not do so. Through your baptism, you have a share in what He did, you grab hold of the righteousness that He earned. Your baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is your assurance that you are God's child and that your sins have been forgiven.

There is a danger of misunderstanding what this means. The fact that your sins have been forgiven does not mean that you are without sin. **We continue to fall short** of God's desire for us in our lives. Each week as you come here, you are given the opportunity to acknowledge your sins, confess them publicly, and to receive **God's assurance that you are forgiven**. With that forgiveness, you state your desire to stop sinning. But the next time you come, you once again must admit that you have fallen short in God's sight. The fact that God has promised to forgive your sins does not mean that it is acceptable for you to keep on sinning. You can't simply think that since Jesus has fulfilled all righteousness for you, you now have a license to sin. Rather, the knowledge of what your Savior has done for you should be your motivation to live a life in keeping with His will, knowing that when you do fall short, you will be forgiven.

In this regard, you should think of your baptism as **your "ordination"** of sorts. Your baptism, and the faith which receives its benefits, marks you as one who accepts the merits of Jesus Christ. It also says that you are ready and willing to conform your life to God's will. Thinking on your baptism each day will lead you to resolve to stop sinning as a response to the righteousness Christ has given you. And you will want to share the message that you have been forgiven with those around you.

A man was traveling on an ocean liner. He was leaning over the ship's rail, tossing something into the air and catching it again. An onlooker asked him, "What is it you are tossing in the air?" The man replied, "A diamond of great value. It is all I have in the world." The onlooker asked, "Isn't that an awful risk to take, throwing it up in the air over the ocean?" "No," he answered. "I've been doing it for a half hour now, and I catch it every time." The man laughed and tossed it up again—but this time he missed it. Both of them stood there for a minute, trying to comprehend what had happened. And then the man, fully realizing what had happened, began to sob uncontrollably. His treasure was lost, and there was nothing anyone could do about it. Can you imagine anyone being so careless and irresponsible?

There is a world full of people who trifle with their souls in the same way. They do not accept the Good News of Jesus as their Savior from sin. And we are the onlookers. Can you stand by watching and do nothing? Your task, as the ones who know what God has done for you, is to share this Good News with them and pray that the Holy Spirit will work through you and bring them to faith.

**Jesus has fulfilled all righteousness for you.** It is something He offers to you. I found a hymn that expresses this thought, and I really wanted to use it today. However, I know if I had used it I would have been singing a solo, because the melody is totally unfamiliar to you and not very “singable.” And the meter is such that you can’t sing it to a different melody. But the lyrics are powerful, and I want to share the first stanza with you now.

**To Jordan came the Christ our Lord, To Do his Father’s pleasure;  
Baptized by John, the Father’s Word Was given us to treasure.  
This heav’ly washing now shall be A cleansing from transgression.  
And, by his blood and agony, Release from death’s oppression.  
A new life now awaits us.**

**LW #223 vs 1**

**Jesus fulfilled all righteousness for you.** May the assurance that God has given you this gift comfort and strengthen you.