

The Baptism of Our Lord – 2026

Isaiah 42:1-9

Romans 6:1-11

Matthew 3:13-17

Why was Jesus baptized? It's almost the same question as "Why did Jesus die on a cross?" I realize that what Christians equate with baptism is forgiveness and Jesus had no sin; He didn't need the forgiveness that thieves and gossips and adulterers and liars and garden-variety selfish husbands need. Jesus is the source of forgiveness, not one who pulls from the bank. But if you're surprised that Jesus is baptized, you're in good company.

John was surprised. John protested. "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" (Matthew 3:14). John *knows* that Jesus is the Messiah. John *knows* that Jesus is the sinless Son of the God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. But our Lord was determined. He *must* go into the water. He *must* be baptized. Why?

As a youngster, my g-g-g-generation had simple games. A bat and a ball; an old coffee can and places to hide; a rope to jump, a tree to climb, a tire swing, four square, tether ball, monkey bars; and that little hand-held game with squares with numbers on them that one could slide around inside a bigger square and the goal was to get them in order, left to right, row by row. There was a space missing so that one could move the numbers about to achieve the goal. You, or your friend, would scramble the numbers and then you set yourself toward getting them aligned properly. When you completed the task properly, you could show anyone and the result would be obvious. Yep, you nailed it. Jesus' Baptism is the theological version of that children's game. There is only one way to understand this pivotal event. It's not complex. It is straightforward and beautiful and elegantly graceful – full of love and intent. It is also bloody and victorious and heavenly and comforting.

What is Jesus' job? The Lord has a vocation, what is it? He is the Savior. He has come to bear the sins of the world. His job is to reclaim humanity for the Father. He is the new and greater Adam, the perfect Son of the perfect Father who came to confront Satan and death and vanquish them. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, He is true God and true Man in one person. He identifies with you. He is omnipotent, eternal and radically holy, and He identifies with you. For thirty years, Jesus stayed in the public shadows. For thirty years, the Lord Christ bided His time and waited. Now, at the Jordan River, by John's baptism, Jesus begins His public ministry. The time is at hand. The kingdom, the rule and reign of Christ, is breaking in and Jesus begins His public ministry. How? By being baptized. What is Jesus' job? The Lord has a vocation, what is it? He is the Savior. How will he save us? By bearing our sin, by dying in our place, taking our punishment upon Himself, by disarming sin and Satan, and death. And so He is baptized. Now He begins.

All those other people who made their way to John to be baptized – they had their sins washed off. Those sins have to go somewhere. Sin doesn't just evaporate into the ether. Sin is a real commodity and it can't be obliterated by a ray gun or an eloquent prayer or the blood of bulls and goats. The Savior must bear it. The Savior must be punished for it. Jesus is baptized to begin His job. All the other folks had sin washed off. Jesus has sin washed *on*. It is an

exchange, a blessed exchange. For our Lord, the water was laden with death (Luke 12:50). At the Jordan River, Jesus begins to shoulder the weight of sinners.

Jesus hung out with sinners. The religious leaders distanced themselves from those who didn't achieve their sanctified status, but Jesus was in solidarity with sinners. Do you think that that means that He wanted people to continue in their sin, to dismiss God's call to righteousness? St. Paul writes a direct line: "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Romans 5:20). "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin live in it any longer?" (Romans 6:1-2). Died to sin. That's a graphic statement. Died to lust and gossip, how can we live in those things any longer? Died to deceit and pride; died to covetousness and slander and taking the Lord's name in vain; died to hating our brother; died to thinking that you're better than others, died to mistrusting Christ, died to unforgiveness and drunkenness and sexual impropriety; we died to those things, how can we live in them any longer?

When did you die to sin? When you were baptized. Jesus' baptism and yours are linked. It is an exchange. He took what is yours and He gives to you what is His. His baptism in the Jordan led to His baptism in His own blood on the Holy Cross. His vocation as Savior led there, to Calvary, to Good Friday and the punishment, the fury of His Father against sin. Jesus became the only sinner, he became sin and justice was done (2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 42:3-4). It may seem strange to you, but as the Father was punishing sin in His Son the echo of what the Father said at Jesus' baptism was in the air: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Every time that we baptize someone at this font, that echo resounds in this place. Because of Jesus, we hear our Father say about us: "This is my son, my daughter, with him, with her I am well pleased." We are adopted (Romans 8:15). We call Almighty God "Our Father." We will not live in sin. We've been delivered, redeemed, purchased by the blood of Christ, brought out of darkness and brought into the Light of Life. Jesus' righteousness has been given to us. We will not live in sin. Christ's blood was in the water of baptism. We have washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14). We will not live in sin. A higher purpose, a divine purpose, a life built on faith and truth and humility and trust – we died with Christ, our old self was crucified with Him (Romans 6:6). We've been set free from sin; how can we live in it any longer?

John the Baptism was right: "I need to be baptized by you." Your righteousness needs to wash me, Your grace needs to recreate me, Your love needs to be poured out on me. Jesus didn't deny it, but at that moment the Lord had a job to do. Jesus is the Christ. What He began at the Jordan River He completed at He was nailed to the tree: Father forgive them. The reason that I chose to read the Gospel lesson from the middle of the nave is because this theological reality is in the midst of us. Jesus' baptism constitutes who we are just like His cross does. Our Lord's ministry is ongoing (John 5:17). We are the recipients of His grace, His presence, His service. His life forges our family. We gather around Him. He loves us. He restores us to the Father. He forgives and forgives and forgives and forgives and forgives and forgives. We trust Him! We serve Him! We cling to what is holy. We renounce the world's shameless ways. We treasure the Word; we treasure the Sacraments; we treasure Christ's church; we treasure our fellow believers. The Lord is still at His job. He said: "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). There are no richer, no truer, no more wonderful words than those.