

Epiphany 1
January 15, 2017

“Jesus Steps in the Waters of the Jordan River to Rescue Us”

MATTHEW 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵ Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented. ¹⁶ 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 alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

A surveillance camera showed twin boys about two and a half years old playing in their bedroom. They pulled out the lower two drawers of a small dresser and climbed up on them. The dresser tipped over and pinned the one brother to the floor. The other brother tried several times to lift the dresser to free his brother, but to no avail. Finally he began pushing against the dresser to move it off his brother. His brother was able to wiggle and get free.

I have a brother who came to rescue me. His name is Jesus. He is the very Son of God but also someone who became like me with skin and bones and flesh and hair. He became like me even wanting to be baptized even though he did not need to be baptized. I am convinced that if I were the only person in the world who had ever sinned, my brother Jesus would have stepped into the waters of the Jordan River to show me personally how he had come to save me and rescue me. Let’s take a closer look at Jesus stepping into the waters of the Jordan River to rescue us.

Jesus stepped in to fulfill all righteousness

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.” Jesus came to be baptized by John. He just didn’t happen to run into John the Baptist as he was baptizing. He purposely went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized. Jesus did not come to have his sins forgiven. He came to be baptized to provide the forgiveness we need from the sin that was crushing us and sending us to eternal death and punishment.

John cannot understand why Jesus came to be baptized when it was not necessary. “But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’” John certainly knew Jesus was his cousin, but he also knew him as the Messiah, the Savior, the very Son of God. It was John who told the crowds that someone coming after him was so great he was not worthy of bending down and untying the laces of his sandals. It was John who pointed to Jesus with the words, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” He spoke of Jesus as someone who came after him yet he was before him, true God from all eternity.

Jesus tells us why he wanted to step into the waters of the Jordan River and be baptized. “Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.’”

Jesus wanted to fulfill all righteousness. He wanted to do everything right. Even though he does not need baptism he steps in to be baptized to identify with us. Even though he is sinless and pure, he will one day have the sins of the world placed on him.

With his baptism Jesus assures us this morning that everything he did was done carefully and thoroughly. He fulfilled all righteousness. This gives us confidence and hope. To illustrate this important point. Some years ago a friend who had his pilot's license asked me to go with him to fly around the Channel Islands. I had never flown in a small plane. I knew my friend had good experience in flying. Before we took off he said, "This is a good day for flying." Then he went through a checklist of items that he rated from one to ten. Because it was such nice weather, he gave that a ten. Because he had a good night sleep and felt mentally sharp he gave that a nine or ten. The plane he was flying was a good plane, another nine or ten. That gave me confidence for my first flight in a private plane. When you add up all the numbers in the life of Jesus, including his stepping in to be baptized, everything is done perfectly. He fulfills all righteousness. That gives us confidence and hope.

The Holy Spirit stepped in to point to Jesus

It isn't just Jesus who steps into the waters of the Jordan River to be baptized and rescue you. The Holy Spirit also comes down from heaven in the form of a dove. "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him." We don't know exactly how the heavens opened up. During the rains this past week, there were times when the clouds cleared and then heavens opened up and the sun came through. The heavens opened and the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove and lighted on Jesus. Later John the Baptist gave this testimony, "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him." In fact the Lord God himself told John that the one on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain on him, that's the One, that's the Messiah, that's the Savior.

In the Old Testament, the prophets, priests and kings were anointed with oil. Perhaps a horn looked something like this (horn) and it was filled with oil. In 1 Samuel 16 we hear how Samuel anointed Saul to be king. "So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him (David) in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power. Jesus was not anointed with oil. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit. In Isaiah 61, the Messiah says, "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor." Jesus read these words in the synagogue in Nazareth and applied them to himself. You will recall when he applied these words to himself and pointed out the rejection of his hometown people, they dragged him to the edge of the town and wanted to throw him over a cliff.

In our second reading for today we heard how Peter talked to some Gentiles about Jesus. He wanted to convince them that Jesus did not just come for the Jewish people, but all the people of the world. Here is what he told these people about Jesus' baptism and the anointing that came from the Holy Spirit. "You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after the baptism that John preached- how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power." The Holy Spirit says to us this morning: "Look at Jesus. He is your Lord and God. He is the one to get the job done for you. No

one else can save you and rescue you from your sin.”

I am born into this world thinking I have the power and strength to save myself. Everything inside of me says, “You can do it on your own.” Remember the children’s book, “The Little Engine that Could.” The Little Engine is asked to pull the train over the mountain to bring toys to little boys and girls on the other side. As he is going up the steep mountain, the little engine says, “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can.” The Holy Spirit comes to us and says, “No, you can’t. No you can’t. No you can’t.” You cannot save yourself. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin. The Holy Spirit anoints Jesus at his baptism and says, “That’s where you need to place your trust and hope.” As we sing in the hymn, “In Christ alone, my hope is found.” Or another hymn, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness.”

We have seen Jesus step into the waters of the Jordan River to be baptized to show how he will do everything perfect to save us. We have seen the Holy Spirit step in to point to Jesus as the place to put our hope. Now we see the Father step in by speaking from heaven.

The Father stepped in by speaking from heaven

“And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’” Here our heavenly Father tells us how much he loves his Son and how pleased he is with the life he is living. This man that you see being baptized by John is the very Son of God. This is our Lord and our God from all eternity. He wears sandals and humble clothes. He must walk to get where he is going. He eats food and drinks water. He sleeps at night. His heart pumps blood throughout his body. His lungs take in air as he breathes. From all appearances Jesus is a man. He is fully human. He often called himself the Son of Man. Yet he is the very Son of God. It is truly a miracle that we believe this with our hearts and confess this real person, who was being baptized as our Lord and God. “No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”

The Father tells us he loves his Son. We human beings cannot begin to fathom the depth of love that existed from all eternity between the Father and the Son. Love is so important to us. All the love in the world compressed and squeezed together cannot begin to compare to the perfect love between the Father and the Son. The love that Abraham had for his son Isaac cannot compare to the love the Father and the Son had together. Yet, our God was willing to give up his Son and have him punished for our sin in our place. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

The Father was pleased with the life Jesus was living. Here is Jesus stepping into the waters of the Jordan River living the perfect life none of us could ever live. I think of how pleased God was when he finished his creation. It says in Genesis one, “And God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” It was perfect. So it was with the life Jesus was living and the death he would die on the cross for our sin. To show that he accepted everything Jesus did for us, the Father raised him to life again on the third day.

Every week of life on this earth, I struggle to love the Lord our God with all my heart soul and mind and my neighbor as myself. My imperfections or sins are everywhere and so are

yours. They don't just annoy us, they condemn us to eternal death. They pull us down to everlasting punishment. Imagine being thrown into the ocean with a five gallon bucket of concrete attached to you. Sin pulls us into eternal death. Then Jesus steps in to live the perfect life and die the perfect death to free us. At his baptism our brother Jesus shows us how willing he is to accomplish all this for us. The Holy Spirit points to him as the place for us to put our trust and hope. The Father even speaks from heaven to tell us how pleased he was with Jesus work of rescuing us. How blessed we are to have such a brother. Amen.