

Sermon for the Baptism of our Lord – Matthew 3:13-17

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

There was John the Baptizer standing on the banks of the Jordan offering a baptism to sinners for the forgiveness of sins. He called on each and every sinner to repent. The baptism John offered was one of betterment for transgressors so that they were made clean. His baptism was for sinners who hoped in a Savior. John's baptism was fitting for everyone. That is, everyone except Jesus.

Nonetheless, here Jesus comes. As Christ approaches John calls out, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John knew that God's own Son, Jesus Christ was sinless. He was perfect and pure with no sin in him. He had never committed a sin in thought, word, or deed. Concerning John's baptism, the baptism for sinners and for repentance, Jesus need not apply. But our Lord insisted. To which John said, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" It's as if John said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. I'm the sinner here. You're the One who is perfect. You need to cleanse me. I cannot baptize you; you are already clean." Still our Lord insisted. It was fitting to fulfill all righteousness. St. Matthew's Gospel says that John would have prevented Him. Prevented Him. The Greek word used for John's initial refusal was "DEE-eck-oh-LOO-an" which can be translated "prevented Him, hindered Him, stopped Him, or forbid Him." John would have prevented and forbid Jesus from this Baptism for sinners. John would have stopped the fulfillment of all righteousness.

But are there times that we also "DEE-eck-oh-LOO-an" the fulfillment of all righteousness? Do we speak to our family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors that word of God which is hard to speak and thereby prevent all righteousness? Do we stop the Lord's righteousness by looking at our sins as small and manageable, so that we can take care of them ourselves, instead of relying on the righteousness He gives through Holy Absolution and Holy Communion?

John would have prevented our Lord from receiving the sinner's Baptism. John would have hindered, stopped, and forbid this Baptism to take place. But the Lord insisted that He be baptized with the sinner's Baptism, too. "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting to fulfill all righteousness." Now just what did He mean by that?

In this phrase, "to fulfill all righteousness," in regard to the Lord's Baptism we see the central aspect of Christ's forgiving work, something we see again and again in the New Testament. However, some Christians would see Christ's Baptism as the good moral example which we are to follow from our Great Teacher. The logic goes, since Jesus was baptized, I must live up to this example and be baptized. The Old Adam loves this. He says, 'I must keep the law perfectly like He did. My salvation, then, depends upon how well I follow Christ's moral example, that I may fulfill all

righteousness.' The Old Adam has a hay-day trying to keep the law and participate in his own salvation. But that would be the man-centered view of Christ's Baptism to fulfill all righteousness.

In His Baptism (and in all the other events in His life, for that matter), Christ came not to be the example, but to be the Savior and the Redeemer. He came to serve and not to be served. He completed the law which we never could and which we never will. He fulfilled the law that we continually violate and neglect. Our Savior and Redeemer doesn't lay down more laws, but He takes our law breaking upon Himself and finally suffered and died in our place. Christ fulfills all righteousness to show that God's Law really is valid: the sins of the world cast upon Him did result in His death. Yet at the same time He made all those who continually break the Law, to be liberated from this death.

And that's why the Lord wanted to be baptized. In His baptism, Christ identifies Himself with guilt-ridden humanity. He didn't have to do it. He alone had the right to say, "I am without guilt and I don't deserve to suffer anything." Yet, He would not separate Himself from us. Christ shared everything with us. Though He could have, Jesus didn't put Himself above us.

In His sinless purity, Christ had the right to separate Himself from us, but he didn't. He bore the cross and still bears our crosses alongside with us. We also have the right to separate ourselves from others (or, better put, we think we have that right). But how can we, who have shared in the blessings of Christ's cross not share in the disgraces, the sufferings, yes, the crosses of others? How can we refuse to bear the burdens of him and her and her and him and all the him's and her's whom Christ has woven into our lives? Why would we also seek to avoid even the crosses which God has put into our own lives? St. Paul would remind us: "... God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong."

Christ chose what is weak for you. Christ chose what is foolish for you. Christ chose to die on the cross for you. He subjected Himself to judgment. He took part in penance and made our burdens and our guilt His own, and in so doing fulfilled all righteousness. That's how our Lord was baptized. His Baptism was different. Christ's Baptism by John wasn't the same Baptism that He Himself instituted for us. His Baptism was a mile marker along the way pointing to the Baptism He would later endure. That Baptism was not one of fire or water. That was a Baptism of blood. Christ's crucifixion was His Baptism into death. It was His agonizing and suffering Baptism into death.

So now, through this washing in His name, your Baptism is not only the death of your Old Adam (sinful nature), but also the beginning of your resurrected life in Christ.

Even your death is the entrance into eternal life. You are the Father's sons and daughters with whom He is well-pleased. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠