

Sermon for January 11, 2026 – Epiphany 1

Matthew 3:13-17 (EHV)

Theme: **Even Jesus was baptized!**

- 1) His baptism revealed Him as the Christ.
- 2) His baptism reveals what happened at your baptism.

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John at the Jordan. ¹⁴But John tried to stop him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?" ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, because it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then John let him. ¹⁶After Jesus was baptized, he immediately went up out of the water. Suddenly, the heavens were opened for him! He saw the Spirit of God, descending like a dove and landing on him, ¹⁷and a voice out of the heavens said, "This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him."

Why do Lutherans make such a big deal about baptism? After all, what do we see with our eyes? A pastor applies plain water to a person and says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." What does that even mean? And why is it so important?

Sadly, many Christians wrongly believe that baptism is nothing more than an act of dedication—something a person does for God. But the Bible teaches us something very different. Baptism is not something you do for God; it is something God does for you. Through this blessed sacrament, God washes away your sin, gives you His Holy Spirit, creates and strengthens your faith, and declares you, a sinner, to be His own child through faith in Jesus.

Yes, baptism is so incredibly important that **even Jesus was baptized**. 1) His baptism revealed Him as the Christ. 2) His baptism reveals what happened at your baptism.

Part One: His baptism revealed Him as the Christ.

Our text takes place about thirty years after Jesus' birth. During that time, He lived quietly in Galilee, hidden from public view, faithfully helping to support His family. But His life during those years was not insignificant. Even then, Jesus was saving you. How? By perfectly keeping God's law in your place. Though tempted in every way as we are, He never sinned. He was earning the righteousness you need to stand before God.ⁱ

At this time, John the Baptist's ministry was in full swing. He called people to repentance and faith, preparing them for the coming Messiah. When the crowds wondered whether John himself might be the Christ, he clearly denied it. He baptized with water for repentance, but the Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.ⁱⁱ

Not too long after John confessed this, *Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John at the Jordan. ¹⁴But John tried to stop him.*

The Greek grammar behind the phrase “*John tried to stop him*” implies continuous resistance.

But why was John so troubled by Jesus' request? Because baptism was for sinners—people who needed cleansing and forgiveness. But the Christ was to be sinless. Wasn't John's baptism meant to prepare the people for the spiritual cleansing the coming Christ would provide? How then could the sinless Son of God ask for a baptism meant for sinners?

Therefore, we can almost hear John pleading, “No, Jesus. I am the sinner, and you are the Saviour. *I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?*”

What John did not yet understand was that Jesus was not asking for baptism to forgive His own sins. His baptism would serve another purpose. So, *Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, because it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John let him.*

What righteousness was Jesus fulfilling? **Ours**, as the Apostle Paul writes: ²¹*God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Jesus did not need baptism for Himself. He underwent it for you. Though sinless, Jesus identified himself with the sinners, willingly taking our sins upon Himself and presenting Himself for baptism. He offered the perfect repentance we could never offer. He placed Himself under God's judgment in our place, beginning the path that would lead Him to the cross. At His baptism, He publicly took on the role of our Saviour.

And God the Father put His stamp of approval on Jesus to do all this, as our text continues:

¹⁶*After Jesus was baptized, he immediately went up out of the water. Suddenly, the heavens were opened for him! He saw the Spirit of God, descending like a dove and landing on him, ¹⁷and a voice out of the heavens said, “This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him.”*

Even though the Holy Spirit had been with Jesus since His conception, God the Father publicly anointed Him with the Spirit at His baptism to give Him the gifts necessary to carry out His mission and ministry as our Saviour.

God the Father also reassured Jesus that He was His Son, in whom He was well pleased. Why? Because forty days after His baptism, the devil would try to get Jesus to doubt His identity - tempting Jesus to prove it by performing miracles. The Father's declaration strengthened Jesus' faith to face the devil's temptations for our sake.

Jesus' identity was publicly revealed at His baptism. For your sake, He was washed clean of our sins to fulfil all righteousness. To forgive your sins, He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and given every gift necessary to carry out His mission as your Saviour. God the Father identified Him as His Son, not only to strengthen Him to face the devil's temptations but also for you: that you might know exactly who Jesus is and believe in Him for salvation.

Having explored how Jesus' baptism identified Him as the Christ, let's now examine what His baptism teaches us about our own.

Part Two: His baptism reveals what happened at your baptism.

As I implied at the beginning of this sermon, many Christians today misunderstand baptism. Thinking it is merely a human decision to dedicate oneself to God, many delay baptizing their children until they are “old enough to choose for themselves” whether they want it. How foolish? I mean, would you delay giving vegetables to your children until they could decide for themselves whether they wanted them? Of course not. “But vegetables are important,” someone might protest. So is baptism, as Martin Luther once said:

“The Son of God had himself baptized, how can you then be so arrogant, yes, so blind and foolish, that you despise holy baptism? Even if baptism was of no other use or benefit to you, should you not give it all honor simply because you hear that the Son of God had himself baptized?”

Yes, the mere fact that God’s Son underwent baptism should be reason enough for you to want baptism for you and your children.

But Jesus’ baptism does far more than give us an example.

Because Jesus was anointed as your Saviour at His baptism, your baptism is filled with meaning and promise. Through it, God gives you some of the very gifts He gave Jesus at His baptism.

For example, after washing all your sins away at your baptism, God declared in heaven, “You are my son. You are my daughter. I am well pleased with you, because I have clothed you in my Son’s righteousness. Now, whenever I look at you, I see Him and love you as much as Jesus.”

How can we be sure that this is true? Because God’s Word says: *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Indeed, as many of you as were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.*^{iv}

And, just as Jesus received the Holy Spirit at His baptism to equip Him for his ministry and mission as our Saviour, so God gave you the Holy Spirit at your baptism to equip you with every gift necessary to live as His dearly loved child on this earth. How do I know this is true? Because the Bible says: *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children.”*^v

And just as heaven was opened at Jesus’ baptism, heaven has been opened to you. Why? Because Jesus fulfilled all righteousness for you, died on the cross in payment for your sins, and rose again to prove you are reconciled to God. Through baptism, God connected you to Christ’s death and resurrection, giving you a new birth into a living hope.^{vi} By creating faith in your heart, He adopted you as His own, so that you could cry out with the apostle John:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!^{vii}

Since we receive all these blessings in baptism: the forgiveness of sins, the awakening of faith, rebirth as God's children, the Holy Spirit, and an open heaven... is it any wonder, then, why we Lutherans emphatically desire children to be baptized soon after their birth? Do you now understand why Luther urged Christians to remember their baptisms each morning, to face the evils of each day remembering who they are in Christ, and each evening, so they could go to sleep in the peace of God's forgiving love?

Yes, dear Christian, even Jesus was baptized. His baptism declared him to be the Christ, your Saviour from sin. And it reveals what God did for you at your baptism. May these truths lead you to treasure God's love for you in Christ all the more: how He dedicated Himself fully to saving you, so that you could live with Him forever in heaven. Amen.

ⁱ Hebrews 4:15, EHV

ⁱⁱ Cf. Luke 2:15-17, Matthew 2:11 and John 1:24-27

ⁱⁱⁱ 2 Corinthians 5:21 EHV

^{iv} Galatians 3:26-27 EHV

^v Act 2:38-39 EHV

^{vi} Cf. 1 Peter 1:3-4

^{vii} 1 John 3:1 NIV84