

Sunday, January 11, 2026

The Baptism of Our Lord A

Matthew 3:13-17; Isaiah 42:1-9

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

In our Gospel Reading this morning,

John the Baptist is certain of one thing.
 This shouldn't be happening.
 The greater has come to the lesser.
 He's not worthy to touch Jesus sandals.
 He needs baptism from Jesus.
 But Jesus asks to be baptized.
 The sinless one steps into a sinner's baptism.

The Servant Isaiah promised has come.

The Messiah whose way John is preparing has arrived.
 And it is, and it isn't, what John expected.

Like John the Baptist,

we don't always know what following Jesus will look like.
 But thanks to the revelation of today's texts,
 we do know **who** we follow.
 We follow Jesus, and Jesus is for us.
 We know Him and can trust His plan.
 Jesus is our saviour.
 Jesus is God's Son, given to us.
 Jesus is:
*"a covenant for the people
 and a light for the Gentiles,
 to open eyes that are blind,
 to free captives from prison
 and to release from the dungeon
 those who sit in darkness."* (Isaiah 42:6–7.)

1.

My friends,

*"John tried to prevent Him, saying,
'I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?'"*
(Matthew 3:14)

The Forerunner knew some things, but He didn't know everything.
John expected a Messiah who would baptize others.
He did not expect One who steps into the water Himself.
Even faithful servants
don't always understand what obedience will look like.

John knows who Jesus is.

He knows Jesus is the Messiah.
He says to Jesus, *'I need to be baptized by You.'*
Because John knows what baptism is for: repentance, confession.
Baptism is for sinners.
John is a sinner.
But Jesus is **not** a sinner.

What John doesn't know is that Jesus isn't confessing **His** sins.

Instead, Jesus is taking responsibility for **ours**.
Jesus has come to *fulfill all righteousness* in our stead, for us.
He is being numbered with all who enter the waters of baptism.
He is picking up all their sins, so He can carry them to the cross.

Sometimes, our picture of God is a bit off.

We see Him as high and far away.
We think He stays "above" our mess, weakness, and failures.

But here He is, entering fully into our dirty water.

He enters into our frailty, guilt, and death.
God's chosen Servant doesn't cry out and demand attention.
He doesn't come crushing and breaking.
He comes quietly bearing.
Jesus comes **to** the weak, not away from them.

John the Baptist doesn't quite get it yet.

This isn't what he expected.

He never dreamed he would be put in this position.

He didn't know following God would look like this.

And perhaps, his confusion mirrors ours.

We don't always know what serving God will look like.

For a long time,

Zion served God and the community through its school.

Serving God in Zion

looked like operating and supporting a school.

‘Responding to the Word of God,

we educated children as whole people

by placing Christ in the centre of every part of their lives.’

We welcomed families from all backgrounds.

We shared the love of Christ with them.

But now,

the school board is recommending to the Voting Membership
that the school be closed at the end of this current school year.

Today, after service,

we decide together

if it is time to bring these 27 years of ministry to a close.

If we do so,

what serving God in Zion will look like next fall is uncertain.

But God knows what He is doing.

We don't know what obedience will look like this next season.

We don't know what ministry and outreach will look like
without a school.

We don't know how God will work through loss, endings,
or closed doors.

But we do know that grief and weakness are where God arrives.

And a bruised reed He will not break,

and smouldering wick He will not snuff out.

He will faithfully bring forth righteousness.

We often want clarity before trust.

We want success and glorious growth before obedience.

We want to follow Jesus on our own terms.

We are tempted to believe that if things are uncertain, something must be wrong.

We don't like being uncertain or confused.

2.

My friends,

Jesus does not rebuke John for his confusion.

Instead, Jesus steps forward and says, *"Let it be so now."*

And despite his confusion, the Forerunner trusts Jesus.

He consents—he allows—Jesus to be baptized.

This is what we know for sure: Jesus is baptized for us.

"Let it be so now,

for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

(Matthew 3:15).

Jesus fulfills all righteousness for you in the muddy Jordan River.

Jesus stands in the Jordan as the substitute for sinners.

Jesus stands as the bearer of sin.

He is the obedient Son, standing in our place.

He is not repenting of any sins of His own.

He is taking ownership of yours.

There,

"For our sake [God] made Him

to be sin who knew no sin,

so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

(2 Corinthians 5:21).

This baptism is the beginning of His ministry.

It is the beginning of the road to the cross.

At the Jordan, Jesus exchanges places with us.

At the cross, He completes that exchange.

Jesus doesn't wait for perfect understanding.
 He doesn't wait for perfect circumstances.
 He doesn't wait for triumph and success.
 Jesus walks down into the shallow, murky waters of the Jordan.
 Not as an example, but as the fulfillment of all righteousness.

We do not know what the next chapter of our lives holds.
 But we do know
 that Jesus does not stand watching from a distance.
 He comes to us here.
 He goes where His people go.
 Jesus bears what His people bear.
 Jesus is with us.
 Jesus is for us.

3.

My friends,
 Jesus walks up from the river.
 The heavens open.
 The Holy Spirit descends.
 And the Father Speaks.
*"This is My beloved Son,
 with Whom I am well pleased."* (Matthew 3:17)

God gives Him the Holy Spirit so that
"He will bring forth justice to the nations." (Isaiah 42:1.)
 He gives us His one and only Son,
*"as a covenant for the people
 and a light for the Gentiles,
 to open eyes that are blind,
 to free captives from prison
 and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness."*
 (Isaiah 42:6–7.)

At the Jordan river, Jesus has not yet done these things.
 He has just been called and ordained.
 But the Father is already pleased.
"This is My beloved Son."

God the Father's pleasure is not based on visible success.
 It is not based on outcomes.
 His pleasure is not measured by numbers,
 programs, institutions or longevity.
 His pleasure and delight are in His beloved Son.

We don't know everything about the future.
 But what do we know?
 What the Father says of His Son,
 He says of those who are baptized into Him.
 By baptism, you are united to Christ. (Romans 6).
 By faith, you stand there with Jesus on the Jordan.
 Jesus is standing there, in your place.
 And God the Father says,
"This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased."

Because you are united to Jesus:

- His sonship is yours.
- His righteousness is yours.
- His identity defines you.

Your performance is not God's pleasure and delight.
You are God's pleasure and delight.
 For you stand in Jesus, His beloved Son.

When everything seems to grow less,
 When faith feels weak,
 When sin accuses,
 When God seems silent...
 Return to the voice spoken at the font.
 You are
 "baptized in the name of the Father
 and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

You are baptized into Christ.
 You are God's beloved child.
 And in His Son, He is pleased with you.

*

My friends,
No matter what happens,
even as a school closes,
even as futures seem uncertain,
even as paths forward are unclear—

God's Word over His baptized children does not change.

You are His beloved child.
Not because everything worked.
Not because we understand everything.
But because Jesus claimed us as His own.

John didn't understand, but Jesus knew exactly what He was doing.
Jesus' baptism points us to the cross and the empty tomb.
The Father's voice over the Jordan is the Father's voice here.
Baptized into Christ, we live under an open heaven.

Following Jesus does not guarantee clarity, success, or ease.
But His presence and promise are guaranteed.

We don't know what following Jesus will look like next.
But we know:
Jesus is for us.
Jesus has gone before us.
Jesus calls us His own.

The same Lord who stepped into the Jordan now
walks with His church into whatever comes next.

You are baptized into Christ, and you are His beloved children.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, amen.