

**Homily for the Baptism of Our Lord (Year C 2019)**  
**January 13, 2019**  
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Once again, we begin the season of Post Epiphany with the Baptism of our Lord. This feast opens up many questions for us to consider. The main one being: Why did Jesus need to be baptized? Why? Was his baptism the same as others who were baptized? For sin? Or forgiveness, or repentance? What was John the Baptist all about in the scene? Why are each of the gospel accounts of the baptism of Jesus different from one another? I think that this last question forms for us a really good exercise for study. What is different in each of the gospel accounts of the baptism of Jesus?

Here's a summary:

John the Baptist is a revered leader and certainly has a following, as we see evident in this story. But all four gospel accounts have John the Baptist pointing to Jesus as the one with authority and superiority, the one more powerful, and the one to follow.

It would be fair to say that John the Baptist is the facilitator of Jesus' baptism, more or less, but that the Holy Spirit is the true agent, or the power in the baptism.

In Mark and Matthew, we definitively hear that John baptizes Jesus. In John's Gospel, there is no mention of John actual baptizing Jesus, certainly not the direct act of baptizing Jesus. In Luke, we have a middle road, an in-between. Certainly, Jesus' baptism in Luke is passive, and somewhat puzzling, because prior to the mention of Jesus' baptism, we hear a reference to John the Baptist being locked up in prison. It seems a little odd the way that is placed.

One other point of difference in this survey of Jesus' baptismal stories is the voice from heaven, and the reference to the Holy Spirit. In the accounts that we have in Mark and Luke, the voice to Jesus is second person singular, "You are my son".

In Matthew, we hear "This is my Son". In this voice, we hear it more as a public declaration, one for all who witnessed this scene.

And in John, the only reference we have to the scene is as John explains that the one that the Spirit rests on would be the one. (Jesus).

What could be a main point to draw from all these comparisons? It is coming back to that original question that I asked: Why did Jesus need baptism if he was without sin? Certainly, John's baptism was one of repentance, turning one's life around, forsaking the old patterns, old ways, turning away from one's life of wrong and sin. If this baptism were for wiping of sin, turning to new life, why would Jesus require this?

Here are two thoughts. The first is that Jesus was baptized so that he could stand with us through all our experiences, all our hurts, our pain, our suffering, our failings, our grief, our confusion; to know and stand side by side with us through everything, even ultimately our own death. "I am with you through all things."

A second response to the question as to why would Jesus need baptism, could it be that we get our thinking wrong when we think the scandal is that Jesus, he who is without sin, would be baptized like we are? Perhaps the real surprise, shocking and scandalizing reality is that we are baptized like Jesus is, and not the other way around. Yes, baptism is about forgiveness, but more than that. Baptism is about relationship, relationship with God who loves first. That is the essence of the first mark of baptism. That the Holy Spirit rests also on us. That forgiveness does not happen first before there is a relationship, before our being named as a child of God.

Forgiveness is a result of God's love for us, and not a condition of love. Forgiveness is the gift of a loving God, not a mechanism by which love is achieved. That's kind of heavy, and there is a lot to be unpacked there. So I'm going to move on to what we are going to do next.

Now once again it is customary to renew our baptismal promises on this particular Sunday. So what I want you to do as we renew our promises, is I want you to pay attention to the words, specifically the promises. Not to let them pass by as often we do when we've heard things many times before. Think of what those words mean, and how they resound in you.

Think of the action that those promises may be requiring of you. What becomes imperative once that promise is made? This my friends is what it means to be living as an Anglican Christian person.

So pay attention to the words you are saying. Don't speedily recite them. Not a simply quick concurrence, but from our conviction as we enter this new year. These words are not only promises, but they also call us out.

Amen.