January 10/11, 2026
First Sunday after Epiphany – The Baptism of Our Lord
St. Matthew's Lutheran Church
Matthew 3:13-17
Jesus Went to the Jordan For You

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

Wherever Jesus went, there was a purpose. As a 12-year-old Jewish boy legally responsible for his own actions, Jesus willingly went with his parents to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. He showed his willingness to obey the law and his willingness to be in God's house. He went into the wilderness to battle Satan for us. He went into Jerusalem that final Passover week so he could be arrested, put on trial and sentenced to death. He went to the cross so he could die for the world's sins.

It's easy to see why he went and did those things for you. He took your place by obeying the law perfectly, enduring Satan's temptations perfectly, suffering in your place, and dying in your place. But, why did he make the trip to the Jordan to be baptized by John, a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? John says exactly what we all think. **"I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"**

Still, Jesus insists. He went to the Jordan with a purpose. He went to the Jordan for you. John was correct. Jesus didn't need any forgiving. Rather, Jesus went, as was often the case, **"to fulfill all righteousness."** Jesus went to the Jordan to be anointed and equipped by the Spirit and to be confirmed by the Father.

It must have been a shock for John the Baptist to see Jesus coming his way with the intention of being baptized. Sinful humans had been coming to John the Baptist for some time now. That included large crowds who were selfish with their belongings, tax collectors who didn't bat an eye as they cheated people out of money, and soldiers who abused their power. These people came out to confess their sins and have their sins forgiven in baptism.

No doubt John had heard of Jesus from his parents Zechariah and Elizabeth when he was younger. But, even though John and Jesus were relatives, we're wise to assume this is the first public, ministry-focused interaction the two have. Up to this point, John had been doing ministry in the Judean wilderness, preparing the way for Jesus. Jesus had been living up north in Galilee in Nazareth, waiting to begin his full-time public ministry.

Finally, the forerunner and the Savior meet. This first meeting isn't what we might expect. There's a little bit of a disagreement. John tried to deter Jesus from doing what he came to do! This, of course, wouldn't be the last time a follower of Jesus thought he or she knew best. We understand why John tried to deter Jesus. I'm sure we would've done the same. Jesus was completely different from all the other humans who had come to John. Jesus was sinless.

"Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.'" Jesus doesn't correct John's statement. Jesus knew he didn't need forgiveness for himself. Still, Jesus would benefit from this baptism. In addition, you and I and the world needed him to be baptized. Jesus went to the Jordan for you. After hearing Jesus' response, **"John consented."** The forerunner continued his faithful ministry by adhering to God's will. He baptized Jesus.

How did this fulfill all righteousness? For one, Jesus shows us the importance of baptism in our lives. God commands us to be baptized. Jesus was under God's law as we are. So, he too, fulfilled the command to be baptized.

Our text teaches us another important way this fulfilled all righteousness. After the baptism, Jesus departed from the Jordan River. And Matthew tells us, **"At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of**

God descending like a dove and alighting on him." This wasn't an out-of-the-blue moment. God had said this would happen.

Our first lesson declared, **"I will put my Spirit on him."** In the Apostle John's gospel, John the Baptist declares, **"I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'"** (John 1:33) Jesus went to the Jordan for you so you could see with John the Baptist that Jesus was anointed by the Spirit. He received the Spirit's power for the purpose of his ministry.

Jesus already had the Holy Spirit. Jesus was true God. As a member of the Triune God, he worked in harmony with the Father and the Spirit. As true Man, he had the Spirit since his conception when the Spirit was instrumental in conceiving him in Mary's womb. So, why did the Holy Spirit come again upon Jesus? To equip him for his ministry.

Right after his baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness. After 40 days of fasting, he endured a one-on-one battle with Satan's temptations. Many more times Jesus would endure temptation from his own family, from his hometown, and from the religious leaders. Yes, even his own disciples ignorantly tried to deter him from going to the cross. Equipped with the Spirit's power, Jesus perfectly endured these temptations for you. He remained sinless for you.

The same Spirit who descended upon Jesus after his Baptism is the same Spirit he has sent to you. Jesus told his disciples and us while he was in the upper room that he could not send the Spirit unless he first ascended into heaven.

Jesus went to the Jordan for you to show you the importance of the Spirit's work in your life. At Baptism still to this day, the Spirit enters a person's soul and creates faith in Jesus as Savior. The Spirit continually resides there to keep a person in that true faith.

The work of the Spirit doesn't stop there. As the Spirit equipped Jesus to fulfill all of God's law, the Spirit empowers you to daily live according to God's commands by resisting the devil's temptations.

We can't do it ourselves. Jesus could've gone headstrong into his ministry by neglecting the Jordan and his Baptism. But, to fulfill all righteousness and to rely on the Spirit's power, he went to the Jordan. If we think we don't need the same Spirit's help, we're fooling ourselves. If the perfect Son of God and Son of Man leaned on the Spirit's power, so should we. Jesus went to the Jordan for you so you can see the importance of the Spirit's work in your life.

The Spirit's descent upon Jesus also marked him as the Lord's anointed to be the world's Savior. As kings in the Old Testament were anointed with oil after being chosen by God, it was a sign they were God's chosen instrument in those days. Still, the Spirit's descent wasn't an isolated incident.

To leave no room for doubt, God the Father's authoritative voice boomed from heaven. **"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."** There could only be one Savior of the world: God's Son. Any other person claiming to be the world's Savior would be and still is a fraud. God the Father wanted to confirm for the world that Jesus was no fraud.

How can someone please God? By obeying his commands. How can someone perfectly please God? By perfectly obeying his commands, never once disobeying. That's Jesus. That's why God the Father could say, **"I am *well* pleased."**

God the Father didn't say this as someone biased toward his Son. He wasn't afraid to call out his nation of Israel again and again, even his own chosen prophets and kings. David was a man after God's own heart. Yet, David

sinned, and God scolded him for his sin. Never, though, did God the Father have any objective reason to scold his Son, Jesus. Jesus went to the Jordan for you so you could hear this confirmation from the Father about him.

After this event, John the Baptist could faithfully and truthfully point to Jesus and declare, **"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."** If the Father said it, then it has to be true. The Father's powerful word created the world. With such authority he confirmed this Son of Mary to be the world's Savior.

The devil works overtime to get you to doubt that Jesus, someone who lived 2,000 years ago, is your Savior. Can it really be true? It doesn't all make sense, so can you believe it? That's what the devil claims. But, remember who the devil is: the father of lies. Remember who God is: the truth. When doubts haunt your mind, turn to the truth of God's Word and God's declaration of Jesus as the Savior of the world.

Because Jesus is undoubtedly the Savior of the world, he isn't the only one who has heard the Father's words at one's own baptism. You did, too. Through the Scripture, God the Father also says at anyone's baptism, "This is my child, whom I love; with my child I am well pleased." How can he say that despite the times you have disobeyed him?

Jesus went to the Jordan for this reason. So you could hear the Father declare Jesus to be the Savior. So that, when you see him go to the wilderness, to Jerusalem, and all the way to the cross, you see your Savior going ahead of you for you. This wasn't just a man doing good for his own favor with God nor to set a good example. This was a Savior who accomplished salvation for you. Thus, because of Jesus, God the Father is pleased with those who fully lean on Jesus as their Savior. Because of Jesus, God sees you as perfect, spotless, and blameless.

Jesus' baptism may just seem like a formality similar to the coronation of a king. It seems bizarre that the Son of God be baptized by a sinful human being. But, there's so much more there than meets the eye as we've studied. There aren't many events that all 4 gospels include. But, the important ones are all there in each gospel. Jesus' baptism is one of those events.

It was important for Jesus. It was important for John. It's important for you. You see and hear Jesus as the Lord's anointed equipped for carrying out salvation and confirmed as the world's Savior. You learn the importance of the Spirit's power in your life. You believe that because of Jesus, you are confirmed as a beloved child of God with whom he is also well pleased. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.