

Sermon ✝ January 8, 2023

Matthew 3:13-17

Frank H. Maxwell

Don't you find it strange . . . this story . . . I mean have you ever considered the fact that Jesus got baptized! You know Jesus . . . Son of God Jesus . . . Jesus, one with the father from Creation. Don't you ever wonder why he needed to get baptized? This isn't just some ordinary schmo, this is Jesus . . . our Lord and Savior.

This appears to be one of the great mystery stories of the Bible. Why would one who needed no repentance or baptism insist on it? Surely Jesus Christ, of all people, would not need such a rite performed for him. We, like John the Baptist, realize our need for it, but question what it would mean to Jesus.

Like all mystery stories there is an explanation for this. Jesus wanted to experience life as human beings experience it. He would become, in the flesh, an Israelite, thereby fulfilling the act of righteousness as he went forth to speak person to person, to a needy humanity. As it is written in Hebrews: *"For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as are we, yet without sinning."*

And so there was a reason why Jesus was baptized . . . like so many other things in his life . . . he did it for us. Jesus came from Nazareth and was baptized by John. It was a short journey when measured by miles, but it was a momentous occasion.

It marked Jesus' acceptance of vocation as a preacher in the kingdom of God. It called him out of the village of his childhood and early manhood into the larger world of the purposes of God. This experience of Jesus was unique.

There was that dove descending from heaven . . . but this wasn't just some old pigeon . . . it was God's spirit! And then came the voice: *"This is my beloved Son, and he has surely made me happy today."*

Baptism was Jesus' way of remembering what his mission in life was all about.

*In the days when public transportation was still mainly earthbound, a young woman boarded a passenger train to depart for her first year in college in a city some distance from home. It would be her first experience away from her parents, friends, and the familiar people and places of her youth. Her mother, being a typical mother, was clearly concerned about the environment awaiting her oldest daughter. She handed her an envelope and told her daughter not to open it until she arrived at college.*

*When the girl was finally settled in her dormitory room, she opened the envelope and read one simple sentence: "Just remember who you are." Years later she reported that it was the best advice she ever received.*

Jesus' baptism was his way of remembering who he was. He was baptized with power, and in his ministry God was with him.

Why was Jesus baptized? He did it for us. Jesus was God incarnate . . . in the flesh . . . he needed to know, first-hand about all human experience.

There is something to be said about first-hand experience. First-hand experiences are sometimes needed in order that we might better understand some of life's sorrows. I was only 23 when my father died. My mother died some six years later. In both instances, way too early. However, having experienced such loss in early adulthood helped me to better understand grief as I ministered to parishioners mourning the death of a loved one .

By submitting to baptism Jesus affirmed John the Baptizer's message of repentance for sin. Jesus sensed in John's preaching the opening for his response to God's call. It may have been because of John the Baptist that Jesus realized it was his time . . . it was his time to begin his ministry.

It can be so much the same for our lives. Preachers are always preaching . . . but we don't always hear them. And then suddenly one day we do hear their message and all kinds of things begin to click.

Jesus sensed God's power in the preaching of John and his faith became alive. It was God's creative power working through John that made things happen for Jesus. And the same can happen for us.

*For many months a devout woman carried in her heart the heavy burden of grief . . . the death of her husband. At length, it was not so much the passage of time as the deepening of her already lively faith which enabled her to move back into life again. "No, she said one day, "my life is not the same as it was before, but it's still a good life. And with God's help, I'm able to be a part of worthwhile things every day."*

The same story can be told of shattered relationships made whole, of directionless lives that find their focus, of life-destroying habits which are finally pushed aside.

God's creative power comes upon us . . . this creative power flares forth in the Spirit which restores, gives hope, and sets us free.

The moment Jesus accepted John's invitation to baptism was his leap of faith . . . and he did it for us. By example he showed us how to do it. Jesus knew the time was right and he seized the moment.

Hopefully, we too, can seize such moments in our lives . . . to be sure they are not all as dramatic as Jesus' moments . . . but they are no less important.

Why did Jesus get baptized? He did it for us. But he also did it for himself. As he was cleansed by the waters of the Jordan, Jesus was accepting the heavy yoke of suffering that God had ready for him.

Jesus' baptism signaled the beginning of a ministry that would affect humanity forever.

Why did Jesus get baptized? He did it for us.