

Imagine the waters of the Jordan River, very dirty. The waters of the Jordan River were not even really suitable for cleaning, and certainly not even suitable for drinking. In fact, 2 Kings tells of a commander of the Syrian army who had leprosy and was commanded by God's prophet Elisha to wash in the Jordan River. He scoffed at the idea because the waters of Damascus were cleaner. Yet, he cleansed himself in the Jordan and was indeed the Lord cleansed him from the leprosy.

This was not the only miraculous event at the Jordan River. The Jordan River provided the gateway for wondering Israel as they entered into the Promised Land, and more than that the Lord even separated these waters that they may cross on dry ground. And now in the waters of the river Jordan another miraculous occurrence, the baptism of our Lord.

What is baptism? Water joined together with God's Word to deliver the forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil and give eternal salvation to all who believe this. Why in the world then was it necessary for Jesus to be baptized? This is after all the sinless Son of God. Even John recognized his own sin and the perfection of Jesus. John proclaims the need for his own baptism to be given by Jesus. John knew full well who this man was; he was the son of Mary, his cousin, and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

There are some that say Jesus' baptism was done to give us an example of what we should do in our baptism. This thinking leads us to then question if anything actually happened here, was this Jesus merely going through the motions, going through a formality, an empty ritual without substance? No. Jesus' descent into the waters was necessary and our Lord tells us why in answering John, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

Our Lord comes in the midst of the murky, muddy, deadly waters of our sin. All of creation groans, for there is in our midst tragedies, economic troubles, dark passages of depression, pain, suffering, and loneliness all around us. Thus John was proclaiming, repent and be baptized, you who are incapable of fulfilling all righteousness. We poor sinners who groan rather than receive God's Word with joy, we sinners who hold grudges and keep hatred in our hearts, we poor sinners who doubt God's Word and promises and look within ourselves for inner peace and self-fulfillment, repent and be baptized. For you

are conceived and born in the midst of the murky, muddy, and deadly waters of sin, incapable of pulling yourselves out.

The baptism of our Lord consisted more than being baptized because everyone else was doing so, it was more than merely getting wet, it consisted more than being an example of one being baptized; it occurred in order for Jesus to fulfill all righteousness. Did Jesus need to be baptized? Absolutely. In the exact opposite way in which we need baptism. We come to baptism clothed with the dirtiest of burial clothes, dead in our sin. Jesus comes with his garments whiter than any bleach or cleaner can make, brighter than the sun, perfect and holy. The fulfillment of righteousness was that he who was without sin, became sin for you. The fulfillment of righteousness required perfect obedience to law, the fulfillment of righteousness required that the sinless one enter into the filthy sin-filled waters of baptism. When our Lord stepped into the waters of the Jordan River, he took on your sins, he came away from the waters loaded with filth and dirt.

This is why he became flesh, to bear our sin and be our savior, to fulfill all righteousness. He takes your sin and carried it with him to his cross. The fulfillment of all righteousness demanded that blood be shed. Our Lord with all your sins upon him shed his blood for you, to give you the forgiveness of sins, to fulfill for you all righteousness. And death has no dominion over him. "For the death he died he died to sin, once for all."

When Christ drowned in baptism, the heavens opened. The Father is well pleased, for righteousness is being fulfilled. When he died on the cross, graves were opened and men were raised from the dead. The Father is well pleased, for righteousness, the forgiveness of sins, is fulfilled. The only means by which this righteousness comes is the cross of Christ. Truly Christ did take up the sins of the world in His Baptism in the Jordan, but not until the cross was the price paid, and the debt cancelled. Without the death and resurrection of Christ, the Baptism of Christ means nothing. In his death and resurrection, your sins are forgiven.

Your sins buried with him. As the waters of the Jordan river were made for a lavish washing, those waters were poured over as your sins are removed, you are cleansed and made holy, and our Lord brings you through these waters to him, the promised inheritance, the eternal kingdom. You are not

those were baptized, but you are those who are the baptized. It is who you are, it is your identity. You are washed, clean, and pure. "Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: 'I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness.'" (Isaiah 42:5-6a)

It may be difficult at times to see such righteousness. There will still be trials, temptations, and fallings within this life. But let not your hearts be troubled. It is only the work of Satan to pull you away. Do not rest in the subjective, fleeting things that come and go. Do not trust in feelings of happiness or sadness, do not trust in your own sense of well-being and contentment, nor should you be overcome with worry and uncertainty. You have been called to righteousness. The objective, historical reality of Jesus' birth, his fulfilling righteousness for you, his death and resurrection is yours. Just as Christ was raised from the dead, you to have new life. He delivers it to you in the lavish washing of your baptism, as you are buried with him and raised with him. Trust in this, the never failing, never fading Word of God. There is your hope and certainty. You are baptized! In those trials and temptations, Satan here this proclamation, I am baptized into Christ!

Dear Christians, firmly hold this gift and give God thanks forever. It is the power to uplift, in all that you endeavor. When nothing else revives your soul, your baptism stands and makes you whole, and then in death completes you.

God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless and keep you in your baptismal grace unto life everlasting.  
Amen.