

**The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.** <sup>16</sup> **John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.** <sup>17</sup> **His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”**

<sup>21</sup> **When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened** <sup>22</sup> **and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”** (NIV84)

Theme: God’s Son: Baptized for us.

1. He is greater than us.
2. He is anointed as the Christ.

Have you ever thought about how ridiculous baptism seems? It is a strange ritual to the outside world. Completely dunking yourself in water, or just pouring water over the head of someone. And somehow that is supposed to give the forgiveness of sins and eternal life? It doesn’t make sense—and, quite frankly it is contrary to our reason. And yet everyone here is baptized. Even Jesus, God’s Son was baptized. He was baptized for us. At his baptism he is shown to be greater than us and at his baptism he was anointed as the Christ.

I have baptized six people so far. That number isn’t all that large. There are plenty of pastors who baptize more people in one year, or month, or perhaps even a day. John the Baptists too. He baptized many people. Large crowds traveled out to the Jordan River to hear John and to be baptized by him. We are told that John **went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** Some people were so impressed with John that Baptist that they thought he be the Christ—the long awaited Savior of the world. But John insisted that he was not. **I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of**

**whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.**

John wasn’t saying that his baptism was different than the one Jesus’ instituted. They were both instituted by God. They were both for the forgiveness of sins. They both pointed to Christ. Rather John was contrasting him and Jesus. John could only put water on someone’s head and say a few words. It is Jesus who does the work in baptism. That is where the power presides. It doesn’t matter who baptized you. Whether it was me, John the Baptist, the Apostle Paul, or anyone else for that matter. All they did was pour water on your head and say a few words. But it was Jesus who worked through that water. That’s what John meant when he said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is to bring people to faith. That is what happens in baptism. As Peter said in Acts 2, **Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children.** When someone is baptized Jesus sends his Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit works faith into that baby’s heart. Or he increases the faith of those who already believe.

But that’s not the only thing that happens through the waters of baptism. We just read that quote from Peter who said baptism is for the forgiveness of sins. Peter says something similar in Acts 22. **What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.** So baptism gives the forgiveness of sins. And baptism gives faith. That is why Peter can say in his first epistle, **baptism...now saves you.** We are saved through the waters of baptism by the power and promises Christ gives through the sacrament.

God gives us many gifts through baptism. That is why we want all people to be baptized. That is why we were baptized. That is why parents bring their children to be baptized. With all the promises God attaches to baptism, why wouldn’t a believer want to be baptized, or have their child baptized? When Philip shared the gospel with the eunuch from Ethiopia he wanted to be baptized. **Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?**

Sadly, some reject the power of baptism. Some deny that baptism does anything. They make baptism into a sign. Or it is something we do for God to show him our faith. And as a result, many don't baptize their children. Others reject the grace given in baptism. They were believers at one point. But they fall away from the one true faith over time. They turn aside to one false teaching or another. They run toward their own happiness and desires. And they run away from Christ. Or they don't want to live a life of repentance when they are baptized. They get baptized for a show. They want the outward form without any inward change.

But Jesus doesn't just baptize with the Holy Spirit. He also baptizes with fire. Whereas he gives faith to infant, strengthens the faith of believers, and saves through the waters of baptism, he condemns those who do not believe. **His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.** Those who reject his grace will be thrown in the fire of hell. That is where the fire is unquenchable and will not go out. So Jesus has the power to save and the power to condemn. He saves through baptism by giving the Holy Spirit. But those who reject his grace and the Holy Spirit will be condemned.

That is why he is greater than John. That is why he is greater than any of us. As great as John the Baptist was, and Jesus called him **the greatest born of women**, he paled in comparison to Christ. He had no power. All John could do was apply water and say a few words. And the same is said of any of us. But it is Jesus who gives the power in baptism. He is great. We are not. He holds the power of baptism. We do not.

Christ is greater because of who he is and who we are. And who we are is the reason why we have to be baptized in the first place.

By nature we are nothing but children of the devil. From the time we were conceived we were nothing but sinners. As David said in Psalm 51, **Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.** This state of sinfulness was passed down from our parents and ultimately from Adam and Eve. Ever since the first parents sinned, the whole world has been full of sinners. As sinful

human beings gave birth to sinful human beings there have been nothing but sinners. And because we are sinners by nature, by nature we can do nothing but sin. **Without faith we cannot please God.** We can do nothing but sin without faith. And even now as Christians we fail to keep God's laws numerous times a day.

Because we are sinners, because we are children of the devil, we deserve nothing but God's wrath and punishment. As Paul said in Romans 5, **Sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.** We are all sinners. And we are all going to die because of our sins. And we all deserve to die an eternal death for our sins. We are completely dead in our transgressions and sins. We are unable to save ourselves. We need someone to do it for us. And so we are baptized so that we may receive the blessings Christ won for us.

That is why we were baptized. But what about Christ? He wasn't born of two sinful parents. He wasn't a sinner from the time he was conceived. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. He was born of the Virgin Mary. He had no sin. He didn't need to be saved from death. He wasn't on his way to eternal damnation. Yet he was baptized by John. Why? Well it wasn't for him. It was for us.

Christ came down to serve as our substitute. He lived a perfect life so that he could give it to us on the cross. And when he was on that cross he took all our sins upon himself. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** Jesus had become a sinner for us. He took all our sins upon himself when he died on the cross. So he became guilty of all our sins. For this reason he needed to be baptized. He needed to be made righteous through baptism for us because he became guilty of all our sins. As our substitute our sins needed to be washed away through his baptism. That is why Jesus told John in Matthew's account that he needed to be baptized by him. **It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.**

Through our baptisms we are connected to Christ. And we are connected to his baptism. And through our baptisms we now have the righteousness he won for us. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, **For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.** The waters of baptism wash away our soiled garments stained

with sin. And put on the pure white robes of the righteousness of Christ.

For this reason Christ was baptized. But that wasn't the only thing that happened at Christ's baptism. And his baptism he was anointed. He was anointed as the Christ. Christ is the Greek name for the Hebrew name, Messiah. They both mean the anointed one. The one God chose from the beginning of the world to be our Savior. When Christ was baptized he was set apart and shown to be the promised Messiah. When this happened the heavens were opened. The Holy Spirit took the form of a dove. And he descended from heaven. And he landed on Jesus. Jesus was the Messiah. He was anointed as our prophet, priest, and king. He was now introduced as the Messiah. It was now the start of his ministry.

Not only do we see the Son and the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism, but we see the Father as well. All three persons of the Trinity clearly were present and actives at Jesus' baptism. And God the Father spoke to the Son so that all may hear. **This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.** This man standing in the river wasn't just a man. He is God's son. He is God. And God loved him. He not only loved him but he was also pleased with him. That was because he gave up this riches of heaven to live on this sin-filled earth. Because he made himself under the law, taking on the flesh of a weak and fragile human being. Because he willingly gave up everything to save us. Because of what he would do through out his life. Because of his future death and resurrection. Because he is righteous and makes us righteous.

At first glance baptism may seem ridiculous. This whole business of forgiveness and eternal life through the waters of baptism may sound a little ridiculous to our reason. But not when it is attached to the power and promises of Christ. For Christ is greater than all of us. He is righteous and perfect. We are not righteous or perfect. That is why we need to be baptized. And it is through our baptisms that we are connected to Christ and his baptism. And so we are righteous. Amen.