

**Sermon**

**January 11, 2026**

**Matthew 3:13-17**

## **The Water That Changes Everything**

Picture a brand-new car sitting in the showroom. The paint gleams. The leather smells fresh. The engine has never turned over. It's perfect—but it's not doing what it was made to do. Until someone takes the keys, starts that engine, and drives it off the lot, that car is just potential. It's waiting for its purpose to begin.

When Jesus walks into the Jordan River to be baptized by John, something similar is happening—but infinitely more important. The sinless Son of God doesn't need baptism for forgiveness. So why does He wade into those muddy waters?

Matthew tells us that Jesus came "to fulfill all righteousness." That phrase—fulfill all righteousness—those are fighting words to John the Baptist. John tries to stop Him. "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" John knows who Jesus is. John knows Jesus has no sin to wash away. This doesn't make sense. It's backwards. It's upside down.

But Jesus insists: "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

Here's what's happening: Jesus isn't starting His ministry by standing above us, pointing down and saying, "Do better!" He's standing beside us. He's getting in line with sinners. He's taking His place with rebels and failures and people who've made a mess of things. Not because He has to, but because we have to. And He won't let us go alone.

Think about a captain who stays on a sinking ship. He could take the first lifeboat. He has every right to save himself first. But something in him says, "Not without my people." Jesus looks at humanity drowning in sin and says the same thing. "Not without my people."

When Jesus rises from that water, the heavens open. The Father speaks: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." And the Spirit descends like a dove.

This is no ordinary baptism. This is the Trinity showing up to announce: "The rescue mission has officially begun."

Look back to Isaiah 42. Seven hundred years before Jesus stepped into the Jordan, God spoke through the prophet: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him." God was describing someone coming. Someone who would "bring forth justice" but wouldn't break a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering wick. This servant would be gentle with the broken. Patient with the weak.

Isaiah says this servant would be "a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon." And here's the stunning part—verse 8: "I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other."

When the Father calls Jesus "my beloved Son" at the baptism, He's saying, "This is the one Isaiah saw. This is my glory walking among you. This is God with you."

The Greek word Matthew uses for "beloved" is *agapētos*. It means more than just loved—it means "uniquely loved, the only one." It's the same word used when Abraham took Isaac, his only son, up the mountain. Jesus is the Father's only Son, and He's heading toward His own mountain—Calvary.

Now here's where it gets personal for us. Paul writes in Romans 6: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

Your baptism isn't just a nice ceremony. It's not just a family tradition or a photo opportunity. Your baptism connected you to Jesus' baptism. When the water touched your head, you were joined to Him—to His death and His resurrection. The old you, the one chained to sin? Dead and buried. The new you, alive in Christ? Raised up to walk in newness of life.

Paul uses the word *baptizō* in Greek, which can mean to plunge, to immerse, to overwhelm. Whether water was poured on your head or you were dunked under,

God plunged you into Christ's death. You went down into the grave with Him. But—and here's the explosion of joy—you came up with Him too!

Think of it like this: In 1896, a prisoner in France named Alfred Dreyfus was falsely convicted of treason. He spent years on Devil's Island, a prison so harsh that few survived. Then the truth came out. He was innocent. But imagine if someone who loved Dreyfus deeply had said, "I'll take his place. I'll serve his sentence. Let him go free." That's what Jesus did—except the prison was real, the sentence was death, and every one of us was guilty.

When you were baptized, God said over you what He said over Jesus: "This is my beloved child." Not because you're perfect. Not because you've earned it. But because you're in Christ. Covered by Him. Hidden in Him. The Father looks at you through Jesus and sees beloved sons and daughters.

But here's the tension we live in: Paul asks in Romans 6:1, "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" It's a real question. If we're already forgiven, why not just keep sinning? Why fight temptation? Why bother trying to live differently?

Paul's answer is sharp: "By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"

You can't stay in the coffin after you've been raised from the dead. You can't keep living like the old you when the old you is dead and buried. That doesn't mean you're suddenly perfect—far from it. But it means the power of sin is broken. You're not its slave anymore. You're free.

When Jesus rose from the Jordan waters, He went immediately into the wilderness to face Satan's temptations. He fought the devil—and won—so that when you face temptation, you don't face it alone. He's already fought that battle. His victory is your victory.

So what does this mean for you today, right now, this week? It means when you fail—and you will—you don't have to despair. You're baptized. You're in Christ. The Father's voice over Jesus is His voice over you: "My beloved child." When guilt tries to drown you, remember: you already drowned in baptism, and you came up alive in Jesus.

It means when you face trials that feel overwhelming, when life feels like a wilderness, Christ has been there. He knows. He walks with you. The same Spirit that descended on Him rests on you.

It means you can face your sin honestly, because you're not trying to save yourself anymore. Jesus already did that. You can confess. You can repent. You can receive forgiveness—again and again and again.

Jesus walked into the Jordan to stand with sinners. He went to the cross to die for sinners. He rose from the grave to give sinners new life. And in your baptism, He pulled you into that whole story. You're His now. Dead to sin. Alive to God. Beloved. Forgiven. Free.

That car in the showroom? It was made to drive. You? You were made for this—to live in the freedom and joy of being God's beloved child, walking each day in the new life Jesus won for you. Amen.

**The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.**

Pastor Ron Breight      Christ Lutheran Church   Forest Hills, Pennsylvania

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