

“LET IT BE SO NOW, FOR THUS IT IS FITTING FOR US TO FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS”.

On Jordan's banks the Baptist cries, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (3:2). And by golly, the people listened. The Evangelist tells us, *Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him* (3:5). And why shouldn't they? They heard the Baptist's preaching and they knew they were sinners. And so, the tax collectors went, the soldiers went, and the butchers, the bakers, and the candlestick makers went. They all went to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

And even Jesus went out to John to be baptized by him in the Jordan River. As you ponder that picture, you just have to say to yourself, “One of these things is not like the others, one of these things doesn't belong.” There's something **wrong** with this picture.

I say that because John is preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. So we can understand why the sinners are there – the tax collectors, the soldiers, and Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan. That makes sense. But Jesus? What is Jesus doing there, to receive a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? That doesn't make a lot of sense. It doesn't make a lot of sense because we know from our *Small Catechism* that baptism gives the forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation. So, why did Jesus go to John to be baptized? He, by His very nature, had no sin, which needed forgiving. He was already mightier than the devil. He had eternal life. So, why was He baptized? My Dear Christian Friends, the answer to

that question is found in the words of Jesus to John, “*Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*”.

I. To understand those words, let’s begin by asking: What kind of person are you? The answer to that question is simple: you are not the person that God demands you to be.

If anyone is in Christ, the Bible says, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Cor 5:17). You are a new creation in Christ. But, you don’t show it, do you? You don’t think, you don’t speak, and you don’t live as the new creation you are in Christ. We are filled only with concern for self; we are insincere; we are puffed up in pride; we harbor resentments.

You do not treat your neighbor as God treats you. You expect God to forgive you, but you refuse to forgive our neighbor. You expect Christ to bear your disappointments and heartaches, but you refuse to bear your neighbor’s disappointments and heartaches. You expect Christ to carry the cross for you, but you complain and gripe when God places a cross on you, thinking you are too good for a cross.

We are not holy like God. We are sinners. In the death of our sin, it is hard to see ourselves as the sinners we are. But, the Law of God shows us that we are by nature and unclean and have justly deserve God’s present and eternal punishment. We are not righteous before God.

II. The GOOD NEWS is that Jesus becomes THE sinner in your place, for you. In Baptism, the Blessed Exchange occurs. Jesus was not baptized to have His sins forgiven; He was baptized so that the sin of the entire world would be washed upon Him. The Bible teaches us this: *For our sake He [God the Father] made Him [Jesus, His only-begotten Son] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him [in Jesus] we might become the*

righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). The Bible tells us that Jesus is the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). In order to die for the world's sin, Jesus had to have all the world's sin placed upon Him. By stepping into the Jordan, Jesus was taking your sin, and my sin, and the sin of the entire world upon Himself. IN THE JORDAN WATERS, JESUS TAKES THE PLACE OF EVERYS SINNER.

We must remember that **substitution** is the heart of the Gospel. To help us understand this even better, think of the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament. God instructed the High Priest to lay both hands on the head of the scapegoat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the people, all the sins of all the people, thereby putting the people's sin into that goat. Then, that goat was sent into the desert, carrying the sins of the people into that deserted place.

The idea was that God would take their sins off of His people and transfer them to that goat. Then, that goat would carry those sins away, so that those sins would be gone forever.

Dear Friends in Christ, Jesus is our Scapegoat. God took our sins off of us and put them on Jesus. Then, Jesus went to the deserted place of the cross, so that our sins would be gone forever in His cleansing blood.

Jesus was, in His baptism, taking the place of us poor, miserable sinners in order to carry our sins to the cross and forever absolve us from all sin with His Easter resurrection. Now, in our baptism, we sinners are given His righteousness so that it may be our very own.

III. We become righteous before God in our baptism. St. Paul writes, *For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ* (Ga 3:27). In the new birth of our baptism, we are given the righteousness of Christ to wear so that it "covers over" all the filth and shame of our sin.

God looks at us and does not see our sin anymore. He sees only the righteousness of Christ. Wearing the righteousness of Christ, God is well pleased with you.

“To fulfill all righteousness” -- that’s why Jesus goes to the Jordan and is baptized with sinners like us. That’s why He suffers and dies and rises again. That’s why He comes to you in your own baptism. In your own baptism, there is Jesus standing with you, and there you are – **dying** with Him and **rising** with Him. There you are receiving from Him the gifts that He has won: the forgiveness of sin, deliverance from death and the devil, life and salvation. There you are receiving from Him eyes that are wide open to God’s love; ears that hear His voice and follow Him, and release from the dungeon and the prison of sin and hell. There you are having all righteousness fulfilled, having God’s plan of divine salvation enacted in your own life.

And there is more to come. There is more to come for there is one last part of this fulfilling of all righteousness, one last part of this divine plan of salvation. And this part of the will does not include suffering and humiliation and the cross; this part of the plan involves Jesus coming in all the power and might and glory and majesty of God, for that’s what He will do on the last day as He comes as our Judge with His winnowing fork to clear the threshing floor to take the wheat and put it into the barn and take the chaff and burn it with unquenchable fire. And on that day, you will be part of the wheat and you will be put into His barn. And God will say to you what He said to you when you were baptized, “This is my beloved son, this is my beloved daughter, with whom I am well pleased,” for in Christ all righteousness is fulfilled. Amen.