

### **Matthew 3:13-17**

Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw God's Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from the heavens said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."\*

## **A Quiet Beginning** - January 8, 2023

*Matthew 3:13-17*

When Jesus began his ministry it must have been a bit disappointing for John the Baptizer. Today we remember the baptism of Jesus. We've moved rather fast in a few weeks! Christmas was only three weeks ago, last week the wise men came. Now Jesus is all grown up and ready to get to work. That's even faster than the TV shows where a baby is born in one episode and is walking and talking by the end of the season!

Generally, when we talk about the Baptism of Jesus, we focus on the question of why. As followers of Jesus, we use Baptism as our way of celebrating God's love for us, welcoming babies and adults alike into our fellowship. In our Baptism God claims us, and shows that each and every day God can and does remove our sins from us. We only need Baptism once. God's love and grace is enough to last all our lives. Yet, we ask why Jesus was Baptized. He had no sin. He did not need his past and future sins to be washed away because he had never and would never do anything different from the will of God.

But there he was, standing in front of his cousin John, waiting in line like everyone else. Perhaps Jesus felt that he should be baptized so he could experience what all the others waiting with him experienced. Perhaps he wanted to show John that in baptism all human beings become brothers and sisters so he naturally wanted demonstrate his brotherhood with all the people he was going to serve. Maybe, somehow, Jesus thought that he needed to be baptized on the chance that he could be tempted to sin and wanted a reminder of God's love before he began his ministry.

The fact is, we don't exactly know the why of Jesus' baptism, but this passage from Matthew's gospel does talk about the how and our scripture from the prophet Isaiah also tells us more about what Jesus' ministry was going to be like. Together these scriptures foreshadow a quiet beginning to Jesus' ministry among us, a quiet beginning that would not lead to a quiet ending.

We are familiar with the story. John the Baptizer had already begun his ministry before Jesus. John was busy announcing that the Messiah, the Savior, the great Prophet, was going to come into the world and put everything right. John was loud, he dressed strangely, and most of all, he was not afraid to challenge authority. John criticized the religious leaders and even the king. In so doing, John became every popular among the ordinary people — and he became an enemy of most of the religious leaders and politicians of the day. You might ask what did John think was going to happen with this Savior he was announcing. Surely John thought that the Messiah would take over and continue to attack priests and kings and urge the people to repent. Surely John thought that if he was the spark, the Messiah would be the flame to set the world on fire. The way John described the Savior, it seemed he was looking for something big — really big.

So what did John get, something big? No, John got the complete opposite. Recall the scene. John is busy at the Jordan River. There is a line of people who have heard his message and want to reestablish their relationship with God. There's probably also a number of folks representing the religious leaders and the king who were there just to spy and report back if anything unusual happened. In other words, a fairly normal day in the life and ministry of John.

Then, suddenly, a man is standing before John waiting to be baptized. It is Jesus. Now John knew Jesus. He was not a stranger. They were cousins. Remember that 30 years ago, Elizabeth, mother of John, was visited by Mary, mother of Jesus, when Elizabeth was pregnant with John. Israel is not a very big place. John and Jesus would have kept in touch over the years.

We don't really know whether John already knew that his cousin Jesus was the promised Messiah. Probably not. Otherwise, John would likely be saying, "The Messiah is coming and Jesus of Nazareth is his name!" John may not have been aware, or able to accept that his own cousin Jesus was destined to be the savior of the world, the man that he had been predicting for all those years.

Yet, suddenly, there he was, cousin Jesus, standing there waiting to be baptized. And suddenly, John knew. John knew that Jesus was the one. How John knew that Jesus was the one is not clear. However, it is clear that Jesus was not wearing anything special or doing anything special that would make the people standing in line with him think he was special. As far as the crowds were concerned, Jesus was just another guy.

And friends, Jesus began his ministry with baptism, just like all of us begin our ministry with baptism. Quietly and simply. Sometimes, I fear that those of us who call ourselves Christians, or followers of Christ, feel like we are completely unable to do what is expected of us. In other words, we grow up learning that Jesus is savior, Jesus is God, Jesus is perfect, Jesus does miracles, Jesus talked and prayed and healed and spent time with all kinds of people. And then we look at ourselves. We know we are not the savior. We know we aren't God. We know we are far from perfect. We doubt we can do miracles, and we spend a lot of time avoiding people we don't like or understand. In other words our religion constantly reminds us that we are supposed to act like Jesus and think like Jesus and be like Jesus every single day — and we know we can't.

We can try and try and try, but we know that we will never, ever, ever be just like Jesus.

However, this quiet beginning to the ministry of Jesus is helpful for us. It reminds us that Jesus' ministry began quietly, just like our ministry began quietly.

Our ministry? Yes, friends, every one of us in this room is a minister. Some may believe that because I wear these robes that I am the one and only minister and everyone else is an observer. However all these robes represent is a symbol that I have been trained to teach about Jesus. All of

us, all of us, all of us, are ministers. All of us are the people Jesus has chosen to do his work in many different ways. All of us can do the work of Jesus — not perfectly, not exactly, not all the time — but we are ministers just like him because we have all been baptized quietly just like him.

I need to emphasize the quiet beginning of Jesus' ministry — so similar to ours. When Jesus arrived in front of John to be baptized only John knew, somehow, that Jesus was the one, the Messiah. At first, John refused. He told Jesus, "you should be baptizing me!" But Jesus said, "No." You must do this. Jesus was baptized, just like us, to do his ministry in the name of God. We are baptized to do our ministry in the name of God. Together, we are partners — with each other and with Jesus — to minister to the world in the name of God.

Friends, this means everything we say and everything we do is potentially an act of ministry. Your job, your relationships with family and friends, your standing in line at the market — all of these things give us opportunities to minister to the world just like Jesus. Maybe you don't think of yourself as a minister. Maybe you don't think that the simple things you do and say qualify as ministry.

But they do! They really do! Jesus' quiet baptism is what really sets the tone for our life and our work. Very, very few of us are going to live our lives out in front, leading the parade. In fact, most of us do not want to be leaders. We certainly do not want to be in the spotlight like movie stars and politicians. No, most of us want to live quiet lives with minimal attention and Jesus' baptism tells us that living a quiet life is perfectly fine.

In the Gospel of Matthew, after Jesus is baptized, he hears a voice. The voice says, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." We forget, perhaps, that the only one who heard that voice was Jesus himself. The crowds around Jesus did not hear the voice. John the Baptizer did not hear the voice. Only Jesus heard God tell him that God loved him and approved of him.

So it is with us! As ministers of Jesus, we need to remember for whom it is and why it is we are working. Each day, each hour, each minute when we speak and work and act for Jesus, we must remember that most of the time, in fact almost all of the time, the only one who truly sees and hears our ministry in God and God alone. Once in a while, once in a great while we might hear the words, "Thank You," coming from a person or a group. We might sometimes get a card or message of thanks. Rarely, rarely, we might get a gift or some money for an act of ministry. But most of time, most of the time, most of the time, the only approval we will receive in life will be just like what happened to Jesus. God will speak to you, God will say to you, "You are my beloved and I am pleased with you." Only Jesus heard God's voice on that day. When you minister in the name of Jesus, you will hear God's voice.

Never believe that you have to do big and noisy things to be a minister for Jesus. Quiet ways are what he is all about. Remember the words of the prophet Isaiah: He will not cry or lift up his voice, a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.

All this means is that Jesus worked and is working behind the scenes. He is here to take the bruised, the hurt, the sad, the lonely, and help them. All of us can do that. All of us know people and situations that are hurting and sad and lonely. We can be the ones to offer the kind word. We can be the ones to do something kind. We can be the ones who can make a small but important difference in our world today and that is what ministry in Jesus name is all about.

Quiet. Quiet. You may be saying to yourself, "I have never heard the voice of God calling me his beloved son or daughter." Are you sure you haven't? God's voice comes to us in many ways and in many forms. God's voice, God's approval comes not just in sound, but in a look of gratitude. It comes in a ray of sunlight. It comes in an unexpected laugh or smile. I believe we have all heard God's voice at one time or another, blessing us, approving us, loving us — maybe we just didn't understand what we were experiencing.

On that day, wading in the Jordan River, Jesus and only Jesus heard God his Father — Our Father — giving him a blessing and approval. Whenever we minister in Jesus' name — at home, at work, on the street, even online, God is blessing and approving of us.

We need not fear the quiet. We never need to think that we are too small, or too poor, or no educated, or too old, to serve. We can and we do. Remember that all of us were baptized, just like Jesus and we are brothers and sisters together in ministry.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.