

The Reverend Theo Robinson's Sermon
January 11, 2026
Matthew 3:13-17 – “Baptism is Just the Beginning”

O God, take our minds and think through them. Take our lips and speak through them. Take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen.

With a show of hands, who here has been baptized? Who was baptized as a baby? As a young person? As an adult? Do you know why you were baptized? Do you remember it?

In our prayer books, Holy Baptism is defined as “the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children, and makes us members of Christ’s Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God.” It also tells us that the inward and spiritual grace we receive in Baptism is “union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God’s family the Church, forgiveness of sins, and new life in the Holy Spirit.” In all of that definition, the one point that gets brought up the most when talking about the reason for baptizing is the forgiveness of sins. But if that’s the main reason for baptism, then why do we baptize babies? What sin could they have possibly committed? And why, then, would Jesus need to be baptized, if he is considered to be sinless? Is there perhaps another way of looking at baptism?

In Matthew’s version of Jesus’ baptism, even John is confused as to why Jesus wants to be baptized. He says, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” John knows that Jesus is the Messiah, the one he’s been making way for, the one sent by God. So, he is utterly flabbergasted that Jesus asks John to baptize him in the same river everyone else has been baptized in. All Matthew tells us is that John consented. He trusted that Jesus knew what he was doing when he said, “Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.”

What came next sure was exciting! In scripture, the only reference to the trinity appearing as a trinity is in the story of the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan River. We hear of Jesus (the Incarnate Word) coming up from the water and a dove (the Spirit) descending, while a voice from heaven (the Creator) speaks those words of affirmation: “You are my beloved One, with you I am well pleased.” And this wasn’t a private event. John would have seen and heard this happen. The people gathered at the river would have seen and heard this happen. This event was a very public manifestation of the

Spirit of God, as well as a direct announcement of Jesus as the Son of God to John and to all the bystanders.

Our prayer books also tell us that “Baptism is the sign of new life in Christ. Baptism unites Christ with his people. That union is both individual and corporate.” And also “Christians are not just baptized individuals; they are a new humanity.” Jesus’ baptism was less about forgiveness of sins, more about a complete transformation, and it was water that initiated this transformation. Just as with Israel going through the parted Red Sea and given a new law, Jesus was baptized with water in order to receive God’s spirit, God’s wind, God’s breath. The water is a symbol of rebirth, of the coming of a new way.

You see, the baptism of Jesus is not the ending of his ministry, it is just the beginning. It is through his baptism that he is commissioned to begin the public ministry for which he was created and to which he was called. Just as Jesus’s baptism signified the beginning of his participation in a new mission in the world, so too does ours. When we are baptized, we are told that we now share in Christ’s priesthood, even if we are a helpless infant. At our baptism, we are told to “confess the faith of Christ crucified” and “proclaim his resurrection,” even before we are able to speak!

Many times, I’ve had families approach me to baptize their baby and then they’re never to be seen again. It’s as if people think that the baptism of the infant of the young person or the adult is the culminating activity of faith. Get baptized and then you’re done. Right? But there is so much more to do afterwards! By being baptized, we are called to share in Jesus’ ministry, in his priesthood. If we are anxious about the daunting prospect of sharing in Christ’s priesthood, the Gospel can remind us that baptism is a sacrament of joyful connection. In the Incarnation, Jesus shares in our humanity. And in Baptism, we share in Christ’s Body. We are connected not only to God, but to one another, as members of the household of God.

By being baptized, we are called to follow the Way of Jesus, to enact Jesus’ teachings, and to be present in the community. Just as with Jesus, our Baptism is just the beginning of our ministry in the world. And so, this morning, I’m going to walk us through some pieces of the baptismal services, some of the promises we made when we were baptized, promises that perhaps we’ve forgotten. Please pull out the green prayer books you’ll find in the pews. You may have to share with your neighbour. We’re going to start on page 154 and as we go through this process, I want you to really think about the words you are saying. Here we go...

Go through questions on page 154.

Now let's turn to page 159 and answer these questions.

Go through questions on page 159.

Thank you for indulging me. I hope that you were able to truly take to heart the words that were being declared. For some people, baptism has lost its importance, becoming just sprinkling of water on a baby's head, just hell insurance that protects you from the fiery wrath of God, just joining the Jesus Club.

But what happened in Jesus' baptism? The Spirit of God came upon him. He was declared to be the Son of God in whom God delighted. He was called to be the Suffering Servant who carried the whole sins of the world. In our baptism, similar things happen to us as happened to Jesus when he was baptized: The Spirit of God comes into us and remains in us. We are declared to be a child of God. We hear that God is well pleased with us. And so, on this Baptism of Our Lord Sunday, remember your Baptism and live into your calling.

Let us pray.

Lord, pour out your Holy Spirit, so that those who are here baptized may be given new life. Wash away the sin of all those who are cleansed by water and bring them forth as inheritors of your glorious kingdom. To you be given praise and honour and worship through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen.