

But John stopped Him, saying, I have need to be baptized by You, and now You come to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, "Allow it to be so now: for in this way it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness." [Matthew 3.14-15a]

**Today, we observe the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord. The Holy Gospel already read to you introduces the first picture we have of the adult Jesus. The public ministry of Jesus begins with His baptism by John at the Jordan river. St Matthew has just introduced the ministry of John the Baptizer. John is the promised forerunner of the promised Messiah, and with his arrival and his ministry God signals that the ministry of the Messiah is at hand.**

### **I.**

**Thus, the adult Jesus arrives at the place along the Jordan river where John is preaching and baptizing. John is in the midst of his normal daily work-load when Jesus arrives. John basically does three things: He preaches the need for repentance. He hears the confession of sins of those who stand before him, and he baptizes them with water from the river**

**for the remission of sins.**

**Now, Jesus is not there to stand by the side and watch John work. Jesus is not there to say, "Hey, cousin, good work, now you step aside and I'll take over." Jesus is there for one purpose: "Jesus came from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him." Jesus is there to be baptized! Just like the rest of those in the crowd who had come to the Jordan that day.**

**This crowd is here, hearing John, because of his preaching, "Repent : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." So, they are there, to repent. They are there to confess their sins, and John is there to baptize them for the remission of sins. It's the same liturgy, day after day, crowd after crowd.**

**But now, here is Jesus, in this crowd. Surely, Jesus does not need to repent. He does not need to confess. He, of Himself, has no sins to confess. Yet, here He is, standing before John, specifically "to be baptized by him." Why?**

**That is precisely the question on the mind and**

**the tongue of John, who “stopped Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by You, and you come to be baptized by me?” It just doesn’t make sense to John. He knows that what he preaches to others first applies to himself. He knows that he is a sinner, in need of repentance, in need of the confession of sins, in need of the remission of sins. He also knows that this strange and wonderful cousin of his, of whom he first heard on the knee of his mother, Elizabeth, is the Messiah, the Lord, the Savior, the One whose presence he—John—is to proclaim. So, how can it be that Jesus should want to be baptized by him?**

## **II.**

**Listen closely to the answer the Jesus gives to his cousin, John: “Let it be so now: for thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness.” In standard American English, this means: “John, this is a special case. This baptism, which you will do to Me, is what will attach the remission of sins to**

**your baptism, and to all Christian baptism.**

**Jesus is baptized, not because Jesus needs to be baptized, but because you need to be baptized. Jesus is baptized, not to take something out of baptism, but to put something into baptism. Jesus is baptized, not so that He can receive righteousness through it, but so that you can receive His righteousness through it. Jesus is baptized so that what God declares to be true about Him when He stands there, wet with the water of the Jordan, is true of you and all the baptized from the moment you are made wet with the water of holy baptism, namely, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” In holy baptism, Jesus gives you that righteousness, the righteousness of God’s own beloved Son, in whom the Father is well-pleased!**

**St. Paul, describing this same miracle that begins each Christian’s new and eternal life, with these words: “*The Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given***

*to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”*

### III.

Baptism is now that miraculous action of God through which He covers each baptized person with Christ. Through baptism you have put on Christ, just as you put on your clothing this morning. Christ and His righteousness now cover you.

Baptism is the birth certificate of the new birth of water and the Spirit. Every time this happens, another sinner has been covered with Christ, has “put on Christ,” and is now

righteous on account of Christ. All this is provided for you and every Christian in the waters of holy baptism because of the baptism of Jesus, by John, in the Jordan.

St. Paul declares: If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” Paul is NOT saying, if you see or perceive that the old things have passed away, THEN you know that this person is in Christ. NO! He says the opposite: If a person is in Christ—that is, if he or she is baptized into Christ—that person IS a new creation, solely by God’s declaration. And the old things HAVE passed away, just by God’s declaration. And this is true, because—in holy baptism—you, and every baptized person has been clothed with the righteousness that Christ put into baptism when He is baptized by John in the Jordan. What wondrous gifts are yours, in the gift of Holy Baptism!