

Sometimes when you read the bible you will come across things that you don't completely understand or just don't make any sense. Today's Gospel reading is just one of those. The quandary centres around why Jesus was baptised.

To set some context to our reading today, John, who is the forerunner to Jesus, has been calling on people to come and confess their sins. Purification using water would not have been unusual. The Jewish faith would have been very used to the miqvah, or the cleansing ceremonies that would have taken place from the days of Moses, and John has now adopted these purification rituals to offer these to Gentiles who recognized their need to repent of their sins.

So that's the context, but the quandary that I face, is that if this act was a symbol of repentance, then why would a man who never sinned, Jesus, be needing baptized? It just doesn't make any sense that he would need to repent of any sin. So after some research here are some thoughts that may help all of us gain a bit of insight into this well known story.

The first reason Jesus was baptized was to identify with mankind. Yes he was God, but he was Emmanuel – God with us. Now when we read Matthew's account of the same story, Chapter 3, we read that John recognized Jesus did not need to be baptized. But Jesus said, "Let it be so now; It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."

Jesus knew that God had called him to be the redeemer to all people. And therefore he needed to identify with those people he was to save. And so as he stood at the Jordan he came in solidarity with the rest of humanity. And so it's no accident that the writers describe the next event after Christ's baptism being his temptation in the wilderness. Isn't it significant that when Christ empties himself of all his rights and privileges as God in order to save us, that he is faced with the full ugliness of our fallen condition in temptation.

So Jesus was baptized to Identify with us, but also Jesus was baptized **to set an Example to us**. Again Matthew's account states , "It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness". But what does this phrase "fulfill all righteousness" mean?

"Righteousness" is about living in a right relationship with God. This is a relationship lived out in obedience. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance which led to ongoing confession. But key to repentance and confession is future obedience. You can't repent and begin walking with God again without obeying him.

What Jesus is saying here is that to fulfill all that is required from our Heavenly Father, we need to show our desire to start afresh with Christ as the head. Jesus was setting an example of a life which was totally submitted to the will of God and which acted immediately in obedience. The symbol of baptism was an important marker for people to say they were done of the old way of living, and were turning in obedience to God. And for Jesus this was the example he needed to show. This was just the first step in a journey of obedience which would lead Him to the Cross.

For all of us, we struggle with obedience one time or another. Can I however encourage you to step out in faith and obey, because God can only bless you when you choose to obey Him. Luke 3 says that after Jesus was baptized, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. Jesus' obedience led to the outpouring of God's Spirit on his life. And so when we walk in obedience, we can expect to be filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. When we obey, we see God in a new light as heaven is opened up and we receive new revelations of God.

Not just in our own lives, but think also about the life of this church community – do we not want to see God's Spirit moving in a powerful way? If we do then we need to live lives that are obedient to Jesus' example. Follow Jesus' example of obedient living.

So Jesus was baptized therefore to Identify with us , to set an Example, but also to be Anointed. It was the start of his ministry. It was here that he was anointed with the authority for his Father. But all this didn't come about in the Baptism itself, but in what followed immediately afterwards – the anointing by the Holy Spirit.

The word "Anoint" is a word which literally means to rub oil on a person or object. Anointing usually was to symbolize that a person was set apart as holy or consecrated. So temple furnishings and priests were anointed. The other time things were anointed was to confer on them authority. The interesting thing is that the word Christ or Messiah means "Anointed One." So he was set apart as holy and consecrated for the service of God and he was given authority for the work ahead.

But Jesus wasn't anointed with Oil as was tradition, he was anointed with God's Spirit. In Luke 4:18, as Jesus begins his ministry he stands up in the synagogue and reads from Isaiah the prophet "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Jesus was anointed for ministry when the Holy Spirit descended on Him – a ministry marked with power from Heaven. It was to mark the beginning of the end of the old covenant and the coming of the Kingdom of God. No longer would people be reliant on the sacrificial system of the old Covenant. After this point, people could be saved by calling out to Jesus the Messiah in faith.

When each of us receives Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, we are also anointed with the power and the authority of the Holy Spirit. We are set apart and given authority by virtue of the fact that we become Sons and daughters of the most High God just as Jesus was. When we receive the Holy Spirit, we receive his power and his gifts and we begin to manifest his fruit.

Unfortunately, although we have the Spirit indwelling us, we can choose to hinder the Spirit's work in our lives. We can prevent the Spirit working, but if we do, we risk missing all that God wants to do in our lives, in our church, and in this world. And so the question arises, whether we are willing to do what we have been anointed for? You might say, well I could never do what he does. That folks is a lie from the devil,

trying to make you believe that your availability to serve God is based upon your own ability. That is a lie. Your ability comes from the Holy Spirit. Your availability comes from your choice and will whether you wish to be a servant to his greater purpose, irrespective of your age.

The issue of Jesus' baptism has always challenged me so I hope these little pointers of helped. But think about it for a minute – Jesus loves us so much that he steps into the place of humanity to set us an example of a devotion towards his Father God, and from this place in the water he is stirred by his Holy Spirit to go. Each of us I assume have been baptized – so what does that mean to you? Does the example of what Jesus has done stirred you this morning to be filled again by his Spirit in this new year to, as our dismissal says, to go in peace to love and serve the Lord in this day. Let's acknowledge our need to not focus any longer on our ability but on our availability. How can you be available in this 2022. Are you obeying God's revealed will for your life? Be assured that God cannot work through you in power until you surrender to him. So go today and serve Him.