

*Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness... (Matthew 3:15)*

Beginnings are important. Take measuring – when you want to cut, the rule is, “measure twice, cut once.” Why? Because if you’re even a little off, the rest of your project could be in jeopardy. Or take orienteering – if you’re trying to find a way using a compass, and you’re off by even a degree, the farther you travel, the farther away from your destination you’ll end up. Beginnings matter even for books. Almost everyone knows how *Moby Dick* begins: “Call me Ishmael.” The great dystopian classic *1984* begins, “It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.” Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* starts, “Happy families are all alike; unhappy families are all unhappy in their own way.” First lines do more than just pull the reader into the story. They can set the tone for the entire book.

When we think about our Christian lives, we can point to a certain kind of beginning, a very important one. Our Christian walks began in a special way when we were baptized. Sure, hearing the Word and believing can precede Baptism, especially for those who become Christians later in life. But, regardless of when a person is baptized, that baptism marks the beginning of journey as God’s child in Christ, one marked by temptation and attack by the devil, to be sure, but even more by the grace and forgiveness given to us in that *washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit* (Titus 3:5).

On the second Sunday in January, we hear of Jesus’ own baptism. You might wonder why Jesus needed to be baptized. John sure did! *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 thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then [John] consented* (Matthew 3:14–15). Now, it would be tempting to jump right from hearing about Jesus’ Baptism to thinking about our own Baptisms. Oftentimes, sermons on Jesus’ Baptism do just that. While Jesus’ Baptism certainly means something for us – he became man and stands in our place as the second Adam and *fulfills all righteousness* – it means something first and foremost for *Jesus*.

Think again about how important beginnings are. During this Church year, we will mainly be reading through the Gospel of Matthew (we’re back in Series A of the lectionary). Consider how Matthew’s Gospel begins: *The book of the genealogy of Jesus the Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham* (Matthew 1:1). Jesus is the Christ. He is the son of David, the greatest king in the history of the people of Israel. Jesus is the son of Abraham, the prophet, the patriarch, the man to whom God gave his covenant promises. Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One, the great and mighty one whom God would send to restore the kingdom of Israel. And where do we see this ‘anointing’ happen? At his Baptism! As Jesus comes up from the water, the heavens open, and the Holy Spirit comes down in the form of a dove to rest on Jesus. Even more, the voice of God the Father booms down with great authority, *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased* (Matthew 3:17).

It’s no mistake that we hear this reading during Epiphany. It’s here, at Jesus’ Baptism, that God the Father reveals exactly who Jesus is and why he’s come. He is the *beloved Son* of God, who faithfully fulfills God’s will. He is the Christ, the Anointed of God, who comes to reign. He is filled with the Spirit, who drives him out into the wilderness to be tempted by – and to overcome – the devil. Yes, what’s in store for Jesus is temptation, betrayal, and death on the cross. But, even more, God will raise Jesus from the dead. Yes, Jesus’ Baptism can help us to consider our own. First and foremost, though, Jesus’ Baptism is the beginning of his journey toward death, resurrection, and victory over every enemy of God. Thanks be to God for sending his Son for our salvation!

-Pastor Squire

“O time of God appointed, O bright and holy morn! He comes, the King anointed, the Christ, the virgin-born, grim death to vanquish for us, to open heaven before us and bring us life again.”

(“The Only Son from Heaven,” *LSB 402*, v. 2)