

Dear Friends in Christ,

In 1983 the movie “*The Right Stuff*” came out. It was based on a book about the early days of the NASA program. It was movie that received praise and award nominations. One of the reasons listed for it being a good movie was that while it showed the astronauts had the “right stuff” to be heros, it also showed their humanity in some of their weaknesses and failures.

Matthew announces that Jesus is coming into the public eye to carry out his ministry. Both John the Baptist and God the Father point out that Jesus is righteous. In Jesus’ case there are no failings or weakness which are described to make him look more “down to earth.” In fact it is just the opposite. Jesus is described as perfect and we are told he came to fulfill all righteousness.

Perhaps some people are turned off at the idea of a perfect Jesus. They don’t want his help. You and I should be excited. Jesus came for us, to save us. Matthew is saying in chapter 3, **Look, God’s Son Fulfills All Righteousness for You!** Let’s look at Jesus’ Baptism and see how this is true.

1. He was focused on his mission.

Jesus had been living in the north in Nazareth. John is baptizing farther south. Rather than starting his ministry where he was, Jesus comes all the way down to where John is so he can be baptized. It shows us that while Jesus liked to teach and do miracles, he was focused on his main mission. That mission was to save people and make them a part of his Kingdom.

A. We see Jesus is focused and he won’t be deterred from saving sinners.

1. It seems like a small thing. John doesn’t want to baptize Jesus. His reasons are good enough. He says, “**I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?**” John was a good man, but he confesses what each of us needs to confess. “*Jesus I need you to baptize me.*” Remember that John was preaching that the people should repent of their sins. Then he offered them forgiveness of sins in the coming Savior. The way they received that forgiveness was through Baptism. Large crowds came out to hear John and be baptized. The reason was because in church they were hearing that they

had to be good and earn God's favor. They were miserable because they knew they weren't good enough.

You and I can agree. We say, *"I am never good enough to earn God's favor. I sin regularly. I am not by nature the righteous person that God asks me to be."* You can also say, *"I have been baptized into the name of Jesus. So I know my sins have been forgiven."*

Remember John also questions why Jesus has come to him. John knew that God promised a Savior who was a righteous branch from King David's line. The Savior would be right and holy. As the Son of God, Jesus was perfect and he had no need for Baptism. So why did he come to John?

2. One answer is that Jesus wanted to be baptized so he could join us. Jesus wanted to stand with us in Baptism, because later he would stand in for us at the cross. (2 Cor. 5:21) Jesus' baptism also shows that John's baptism was valid and necessary for sinners. Today the Sacrament of Baptism commanded by Christ is good and necessary for you and me.

B. Yet another reason Jesus tells us he came to be baptized was to **"fulfill all righteousness."** Jesus wanted to do everything right for our salvation.

1. Some scholars have said that this was the beginning of his work for us. That isn't quite true. It was the beginning of his public ministry. However, Jesus had been working for our salvation for 30 years. As our brother and substitute he was keeping all of God's laws for us. His baptism was something his Father in heaven wanted him to do and so we see him obeying.

This is amazing. Try this someday when you are sitting in a store or restaurant waiting for someone. Try to remain neutral and see how long it takes you before you are either looking critically at someone because they seem inferior to you or you are looking jealously at someone because of their looks, their clothes or that big purchase you can't afford. Jesus was perfectly content and unselfish every minute of every day! He was obedient for you and me. There is more.

2. Jesus was coming into the public eye to do ministry. But he was also now beginning the journey that would lead him to suffer and die for our sins. It wasn't enough that he was good for us. He had to pay for our debt of sins that we owed God. As Isaiah put it **"he would faithfully bring justice to the nations."** He was still three years away. But his walk would take him ever closer to the cross where he would give his life for the sins of the world. That all starts now at his Baptism in the Jordan River.

C. We are in the festival half of the church year. This is the time when we focus on Jesus and his mission. We will celebrate the completion of that mission on April 16, Easter Sunday. We will talk about his victory even before then, but we need to focus on his words and actions. As Jesus journey's to his final destination, he shows us why Baptism is such a blessing. He does this by deepening our appreciation for the forgiveness of sins and salvation that he earned for us.

2. He was approved by the Father.

When the astronauts from the NASA space program succeeded, they were treated as heroes, they were congratulated by congressmen and presidents and even world leaders. We would expect that the Savior's arrival would have been treated in the same way. However, just as the leaders were suspicious and antagonistic of John, the Baptist, the clergy treated Jesus the same way and ultimately rejected him. (Matt 21:23-27) So those who were looking to Jesus as Savior needed assurance. In verses 16 and 17 we find the heavenly Father giving his approval.

A. After Jesus was baptized and he came out of the river Jordan, at that moment the Father sends the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove who comes down on Jesus. (16)

1. One Bible scholar comments that the dove is a symbol of peace and innocence. (*The People's Bible: Matthew*) In this case the symbolism reminds that Jesus, the Savior, came into the world to bring peace between God and the human race. The angel proclaimed this to the shepherds Christmas night. There is more.

2. This was the Holy Spirit was coming on Jesus in the form of a dove. The Lord tells us through Isaiah that he would anoint his servant, the Savior, with the Holy Spirit. Peter explains in Acts 10, "**God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.**" (38) In the Old Testament the Lord poured his Spirit on prophets and kings to help them in their calling. So Jesus would need this gift to carry out his ministry. It would be especially important when he endured a brutal trial and carried his heavy cross along with the weight of the world's sins. With the help of the Spirit he would bring justice, that is salvation, to the nations.

B. The heavenly Father shows his approval in another way. He speaks words of approval from heaven. "**This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am**

well pleased.” (17)

1. Jesus came from a family that was not rich and was probably dressed in an ordinary way. As far as we know he didn't attend the schools of the Rabbi's. So he looked very ordinary. His Father says, **“This is my Son.”** Jesus may look ordinary, but he is the Son of God. The Father had always loved his Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity, but now he embraces him as a flesh and blood human being. They are still Father and Son.

2. This is also remarkable because God does not embrace human beings in their natural state. Isaiah, the prophet, a good man, saw God in a vision and said, **“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”** (6:5) Good thing it was a vision or Isaiah wouldn't have survived. However, the Father says of Jesus, **“With him I am well pleased.”** The Father was pleased and he could even embrace Jesus, because he was perfect. Jesus, as a man, is still the perfect Son of God.

C. The Father speaks from heaven for a reason. He wants us to trust in Jesus as his Son who is our Savior from sin.

Just as Jesus had his detractors in the 1st century, so he has his detractors in the 21st century. In the past century the devil used intellectual arguments by learned men women to deny miracles and then to deny the Virgin birth. They proclaimed Jesus is just another man. In the 21st century many people no longer look to science and wise men for answers. They want to follow a god who can help them. So Satan has Jihadists killing off Christians, so the world can say, “See your Christ isn't very powerful.” He hopes people drift to Isalm, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.

The Father speaks from heaven and says, **“This is my perfect Son. I sent him to fulfill all righteousness. He died and paid for your sins. He rose from the dead with all power. He is the perfect Savior for you.”** He wants us to listen and to follow Jesus.

Conclusion: Astronauts make for nice heros. We may have other heros that we follow and emulate. Matthew reminds there is only one Savior. At his Baptism Jesus was anointed and proclaimed the Son of God. At the cross and empty tomb he was proclaimed Savior. He had the “right stuff” to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus puts the power in Baptism. Jesus has saved us through Baptism. Believe it! Amen.

Context: What happened at to Jesus at the Jordan River? Jesus comes to be baptized by John in the Jordan River. John sees himself as not worthy and Jesus not needing Baptism. Jesus is set to fulfill all righteousness. The Father points to Jesus as his Son who is the Righteous One.

Malady: We do not fulfill all righteousness and therefore are not pleasing sons and daughters.

Propositional Statement: Jesus came to join us in Baptism to fulfill all righteousness, that is to save us. Jesus is the right Savior as we hear from the Father the verdict that Jesus is “well pleasing.”

FIRST LESSON - Isaiah 42:1-7

(NIV 2011)

- 1 “Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.
- 2 He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
- 3 A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
- 4 he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.
In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”
- 5 This is what God the Lord says—
the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out,
who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it,
who gives breath to its people,
and life to those who walk on it:
- 6 “I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;
I will take hold of your hand.
I will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles,
- 7 to open eyes that are blind,
to free captives from prison
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

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4 he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope."
5 This is what God the LORD says-- he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:
6 "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,
7 to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

PSALM 45 - spoken responsively

Pastor: My heart is stirred by a noble theme

People: as I recite my verses for the king.

Pastor: You are the most excellent of men

People: and your lips have been anointed with grace.

Pastor: Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty One;

People: clothe yourself with splendor and majesty.

Pastor: In your majesty ride forth victoriously

People: let your right hand display awesome deeds.

Pastor: Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;

People: a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.

Pastor: You love righteousness and hate wickedness;

People: therefore God has anointed you with the oil of joy.

Pastor: I will perpetuate your memory through all generations; **People: therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever.**

SECOND LESSON - Acts 10:34-38

(NIV 2011)

34 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. 36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. 37 You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

(NIV 1984)

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THE VERSE OF THE DAY

Alleluia. You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased. Alleluia. (Mark 1:11 NIV)

GOSPEL READING - Matthew 3:13-17

(NIV 2011)

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

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