

Baptized to Fulfill All Righteousness

✠ **Our need** (vv.13-15)

✠ **God's pleasure** (vv.16-17)

In the Name of Jesus our shining Epiphany Light, dear children of God's good pleasure:

Remember last week that story from Herman Gockel's devotional, *My Hand in His*.¹ A young woman went to her pastor with her problem. Though she faithfully went to church, prayed and read her Bible at home, regularly took Lord's Supper, she still felt a distressing sense of sin like none of her girlfriends. She asked her pastor, "Why?" His classic illustration: "If I set 100 pounds of steel on a corpse, would it feel pain?" "No, it's dead." "Right! The spiritually dead cannot feel the weight of sin. But you are alive in Christ, so your sense of sin is healthy." Today the dear Holy Spirit shows how Jesus relieves **Our need** because of **God's pleasure**. Jesus was **Baptized to Fulfill All Righteousness**. Like thirst or hunger or even limited pain, it's a good thing when we feel...

✠ **Our need** (vv.13-15)

Whether it's in your heart or in your hands, feelings of pain can be very deceiving. A few months ago I must have splattered some grease on my finger. It's long since healed, but strangely still burns. My back surgeon warned that your nerves have memory. It's like "phantom pain" of an amputee who lost his foot years ago but still feels cold in that foot. How do you put a warm sock on that? Likewise, your soul keeps hurting even when you don't realize why. It's like one man was a daredevil as a kid. He'd jump out of tall trees and bounce all the way down. Once he ran a screw through his finger, looked at it and said, "That doesn't hurt." Unfortunately, pain denials caught up and rendered him disabled. Apparently, the nerves have memory in your psyche too. Denying **Our need** does not make **Our need** go away.

Imagine how John the Baptist must have felt. The crowds are streaming out of the cities. Then John sees his cousin Jesus of Nazareth coming to be baptized. At first he did not know Jesus was the promised Messiah. Later John says, "***I would not have known him except...***" (John 1:32-34) for the sign God gave. Yet even without the full picture, John still felt tiny in Jesus' presence. So he actually tried to keep from baptizing Jesus. "***I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?***" ***Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, because it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then John let him.***²

It's actually good and healthy for us to feel **Our need** as John felt his. What if you could not feel pain? You might not notice your hand touching the stove until you smelled burning flesh. New air freshener is not the answer. Folks blaming the government for "global warming" cannot save a single soul, not yours or mine either, from the lake of fire for sin. **Our need** finds relief in Jesus' baptism.

As a little kid, you wish you could grow up. You get a little older and wish you could be a better student or friend. You get confirmed and wish you could be a better Christian. If God so blesses, you get married and wish to be a better husband / wife, father / mother – if God blesses you with children. Get promoted and wish you could be a better boss. The older you get, the more you look back and think, "Wish I had not been so foolish!" You start to understand from painful experience why David prayed, "***Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD.***" (Psalm 25:7 NIV84) Or in another Psalm: "***If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.***" (130:3f NIV84)

¹ Gockel, Herman W. *My Hand in His*. St. Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House, 1961.

² *Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV)* © 2016, Wartburg Project. [EHV - Wartburg Project](http://www.wartburgproject.org)

That's why Jesus was **Baptized to Fulfill All Righteousness**. Everything we are supposed to do, all that we need to be, Jesus is and Jesus does. All the debt we owed for our sin, Jesus paid by His death on the cross. God took all our grief because of sin and put it on Jesus + all the goodness that is His and put it on us. This He gave us in our baptism – a great exchange indeed! When trouble and sorrow press hard on your heart, baptism – the BAPTISM OF OUR LORD, and remembering our own Baptism – takes the weight off. Jesus is like your best friend spotting for you at the bench press. You suddenly realize you can't lift that weight. Jesus reaches down and lifts what only He can. By grace it's...

✠ God's pleasure (vv.16-17)

"...to fulfill all righteousness" – That's key here. As Dr. Martin Luther put it: "Why does He come and seek baptism, as there is no sin and uncleanness in Him which baptism would remove?...John here is getting a sinner who in His own person has no sin, and yet is the greatest sinner [because He] bears the sin of the whole world. For this reason [Jesus] permits Himself to be baptized and confesses with this action that He is a sinner,...not for Himself, but for us. For He here takes my place and [yours] and stands in our stead who are sinners. And since all, especially the arrogant saints, do not want to be sinners, [Jesus] must become a sinner for all; He assumes the form of our sinful flesh and complains, as many psalms testify, on the cross and in His passion, of the weight of the sins which He bears."³

God's pleasure takes all sin on Himself and puts *"all righteousness"* on us. This great exchange is only possible because of what Jesus received in His baptism.

The picture on our worship folder reflects the Greek original in verse sixteen: *"After Jesus was baptized, he immediately went up out of the water. Suddenly, the heavens were opened for him! He saw the Spirit of God, descending like a dove and landing on him."* As Jesus is rising up out of the water (*ἀναβαίνω*), the Holy Spirit is coming down (*καταβαίνω*) in supreme, determined love. Two power-verbs as what Peter would tell Gentiles with Cornelius, the Roman centurion: *"You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—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."* (Acts 10:37f NIV84) Jesus' baptism gave God's power and guidance to fulfill His mission and ministry of mercy for us.

As the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write: *"[God] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."* (Titus 3:5–7 NIV84)

"The kindness and love of God our Savior" appeared in the person of Jesus Christ. He rises up in power, the Holy Spirit swoops down like a dove, and the Father's voice thunders: *"This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him."* That voice takes away our greatest fear.

Never will God abandon you since He adopted you into His family by baptism. Say it: "I am baptized." You need never fear the almighty Judge of all the earth. Each of us will stand before Him alone. No one can help you then, not your Mom or Dad, Grandpa or Grandma, friend or spouse – all alone with God. But because of your baptism you will not hear an angry voice, but kindness from the bench. "Look at me," the Judge says softly. And you look up into the smiling face of God. As God appointed, your crucified and risen Savior is both your Brother and your Judge. For your eternal salvation He said: *"It is finished!"* Jesus was **Baptized to Fulfill All Righteousness** – in kindness for **Our Need**, He will not crush the bruised reed or snuff the flickering candle in the wind. Never alone, always with Jesus – say it: "I am baptized." God got a grip on you in baptism. It's **God's pleasure** to keep you as His own forever and always. Remember well. Live large. Amen.

³ Luther, Martin. 7, 691; 11, 2130. Quoted by Kretzmann. *Popular Commentary*. CPH, 1924. NT, Vol. I, p. 16.

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