

To Fulfill All Righteousness

☆ **Our need** (vv.13-15)

☆ **God's pleasure** (vv.15-17)

In the name of the Messiah, the Christ, God's **Anointed One**, dear fellow baptized believers:

It's been said that all Christians should remember the date of their baptism as well as their birthday. For the Holy Spirit shows that in your baptism you were born again to live a new life with God. The forgiveness God gives in that Word-powered water frees us from sin, death and hell. And it all goes back to a moment in time when the obedience and obscurity of Jesus burst into the bright light of history.

Without Christ's Epiphany no one would know about the angels singing the *Glory in Excelsis* to the shepherds on Christmas Eve. Who would remember a baby born in Bethlehem to a virgin mother married to a poor carpenter from the backwater village of Nazareth? All those baby boys killed by Herod would be completely forgotten. The one Herod missed escaped unnoticed to Egypt. Who would remember how the wise men slipped away before Herod could find out from them where to find and kill the baby Jesus? Growing up in Nazareth, he would have remained hidden in the houses he built and furnished with His stepfather. He had no formal education. Owned no land. Had nothing impressive about Him for even His own cousin to recognize Him. Without Epiphany **God's pleasure** would have gone unsatisfied, **Our** greatest **need** unfulfilled for the righteousness God demands to escape the fires of hell and enjoy the bliss of heaven. Behold THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD – **To Fulfill All Righteousness!** Christ meets...

☆ **Our need** (vv.13-15)

Who can describe the excitement of all those crowds streaming out of the cities of Israel down to the Jordan river to be baptized by John? For 400 years God's people had waited in silence with no prophets since Malachi. Yet God's promise kept ringing out across the centuries that a Messiah would come. And now John was saying, ***"Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near!"*** What a shock to hear John blasting their religious leaders as a ***brood of vipers***, hypocrites worthy of God's wrath, to be chopped up under the axe of his righteous judgment. God wanted them and us to know **Our need**.

But who really wants to know this even now? Our heart of hearts whispers, "I'm a pretty good person, at least not as bad as those hypocrites who disagree with me." Sin's wickedness in our country points the finger at everybody else as if we have no bigotry or prejudice of our own. We can get so angry at other opinions that we can't listen, but only shut them out. Then we are also unable to shine the light of Christ into their life for all to see their Savior from sin. **Our need** is personal and national for light.

From thirty years of dark obscurity into the spotlight of history steps the carpenter's son from Nazareth. John admits: ***"I myself did not recognize him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'"*** ³⁴***I saw this myself and have testified that this is the Son of God."*** (John 1:33f EHV)

Our English can't capture the brilliance of Jesus shining forth in public at last. But Jesus' baptism begins His public ministry. Jesus needed baptism from John so that Jesus could call out: ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*** (Matthew 11:28) Honestly, we can sympathize with John trying to hinder, prevent, even forbid Jesus in humble hearted service that needed Jesus to baptize him. Based on Jesus' words that follow, however, this is false humility. Along with John we need keep listening to Jesus. Our finite minds get confused. God's clear Word blesses all who obey even those commands of God that don't make sense to sinful, nearsighted human reason.

Sin darkens our hearts with guilt and fear. But the Savior-God *sends away* our sin and guilt and leaves behind Jesus' sacred, settled peace. God graciously abides with us in the Person of His dear Holy Spirit to focus our minds and to set our hearts at rest. God *fills to the brim* all His ancient promises.

Martin Luther asked a piercing question, *Why does Jesus come to seek Baptism with no sin or uncleanness in Him for Baptism to remove? Yet this will be a blessed Baptism. 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 with His sin, for He had none, but totally with ours. Christ here takes my place and your place and stands in our stead who are sinners. And since all, especially the arrogant saints, do not want to be sinners, He 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.*¹

You could say that all humanity was reduced to one sinner who must suffer the guilt of all in order to pay their penalty and set them all free. Jesus had **To Fulfill All Righteousness** for life and peace –

☆ God's pleasure (vv.15-17)

You see, the key to our confidence in life and in death can only be God's faithfulness. God does not lie, not even when the price is as high as the suffering and death of His only begotten Son. This confidence is all the more certain because Jesus volunteered to suffer and die, rise and ascend as our Lord and Savior. In Him we have living hope which cannot be disappointed. This is **God's pleasure**.

Picture God's law, His righteous demands, as a container which must be *filled up* with holiness in order for us to have a right relationship with the holy God and enter His heaven. It's a far greater requirement than to be a doctor or lawyer, engineer or brain surgeon. On our own, we have nothing but sin and filth to fill it. Only the perfect and holy life of Christ can *fill* this container *to the brim* with all the holiness needed to be acceptable to God. In fact, **God's pleasure** for Jesus' sake is to welcome us as His own dear children. The sin that separates us from God began its cleansing in the Jordan.

Jesus is basically telling John, "If all the poor sinners must come to God for righteousness and be saved, you must baptize me. Because for the sake of sinners I have become a sinner, I must therefore do what God has charged the sinners to do, in order that they may become just and holy through me."²

Mark's God-inspired style uses vivid verbs. Where Matthew writes that "*the heavens were opened*," Mark writes, that the heavens were "*torn open....*" (1:10 – σχιζομένων → σχίζω) God clearly revealed his three distinct persons: the voice, the man, and the dove. Each person's office in the Trinity was revealed: The Father sends His Son to reconcile the world to himself; the Son takes on human flesh to fulfill all righteousness; the Spirit descends to anoint God's chosen one. All make the moment brilliant in Epiphany light when the Messiah's identity and ministry were publicly proclaimed to Israel.

God had promised through Isaiah the prophet 700 years earlier: "*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I am placing my Spirit on him. He will announce a just verdict for the nations.*" (Isaiah 42:1) Here's God's *just verdict* on our Substitute: "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.*" And "*well pleased*" is God with all who trust in His Son.

In the form of a dove God the Holy Spirit descended, most determined to equip Jesus with the power and joy needed for His saving ministry of grace and forgiveness. He would press on to the cross with tender care foretold by Isaiah (42:3) for the "*bent reed*" and the "*dimly burning wick.*" Now Jesus says, "*Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.*" (Luke 12:32) Come boldly and confidently into this Epiphany light because Jesus was baptized **To Fulfill All Righteousness – God's pleasure and Our need**. Baptized believers, be at peace in Christ. Amen.

¹ Luther, Martin. 7, 691; 11, 2130. Quoted in Kretzmann's *Popular Commentary*. CPH, 1924. NT, Vol. I, p. 16.

² Kretzmann, *op. cit.*, quoting Luther (13, 1575; 11, 2139).