

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

“Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. John tried to prevent him, saying ‘I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?’ Jesus said to him in reply, ‘Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’”
Matthew 3: 13-14

That Jesus allowed himself to be baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan before John was arrested and put in prison by King Herod, caused a good deal of confusion after John’s death and after Jesus’ resurrection. Why would Jesus, if he were truly the Son of God, allow himself to be baptized by John the Baptist? John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. What does Jesus, the sinless one of God, have to repent of? So, why would he allow himself to be baptized?

But that thinking presupposes that Jesus is just another Jew living in Israel. He is surely that but he is so much more. Jesus allows himself to be baptized by John because Jesus wants to be in solidarity with each and every one of us who have sinned and have need of repentance and therefore must seek it in some way. Jesus is not a sinner but throws in his lot with us who are. Jesus is different though. Jesus does not come to be baptized with a heart full of sorrow for his own sins. He comes with a heart full of sorrow for our sins and the sins of the whole world.

In addition, Jesus does not come to John’s baptism empty-handed. If you read the rest of the account in Matthew’s gospel you hear God the Father speak and you see the Spirit of the living God descend upon Jesus in the form of a dove. The Spirit is upon Jesus and it is this very Spirit that Jesus brings to the waters of baptism not just in the waters of the Jordan. Jesus imparts the Holy Spirit and from this moment on the Spirit of the Living God is not only present in baptism but is given as a divine gift to each baptized person. Without the Spirit we are not able to live the Way of Christ. We may want to. We may strive to. But we will fail to. The Spirit is the power we need to become the person and the kind of person we want to be. The question is whether we believe that and that is the question of the week.