

**The Question of the Week**

“When Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist, he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. The crowds heard about it and followed him.”

Matthew 14: 13

Jesus of Nazareth went to John the Baptist to be baptized. Although they were related, they did not spend time together growing up. So the meeting at the moment of baptism was not a reunion. It would be like encountering a cousin you had not ever met in thirty years. And John did baptize Jesus although John said that it should probably be the other way around—that Jesus should be baptizing John. It had been revealed to the Baptist that the one on whom he saw the Spirit descend was the Holy One of God, the Messiah. That is what happened. As Jesus came out of the water of the Jordan River, a mighty voice was heard declaring him to be the Beloved Son of the Most High God and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove.

In that moment of his own baptism Jesus elevated the Baptism of John from simply being a baptism of repentance, of being sorry for sins committed, to a baptism that actually bestowed a great gift—the Holy Spirit. A complete washing away of evil. A generous gift of an empowering Spirit. It is this very Spirit that we receive in baptism and is strengthened in Confirmation. Without this Spirit we could not live the way of Jesus. So the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist is a big deal

John’s death, then, would have impacted Jesus. He knew it meant that the time of his own Hour was fast approaching. Jesus knows what happens to prophets. Their message is hated by the powerful and the wealthy. There is too much at stake. Jesus’ message challenges too many ways that the world works. No violence. No hatred. True humility. Care for the other. Putting God first above all personal desires. Loving the enemy and turning the other cheek. No. All of that is too much. Too much of a threat. This Jesus cannot be allowed to succeed. He has got to go. The Baptist first. Then the Preacher from Galilee. Let’s get the Romans to take him out though.

So when Jesus hears what they did to John, it disturbed him deeply, it touched his soul, it awakened an intensified sprint to the cross. The pressure was all now on Jesus. Do you begin to understand? That is the question of the week.