

January 11, 2026

Pastor Prieue

The Baptism of Our Lord

Matthew 3:13-17

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

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

¹⁶As 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. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

Celebrate the Day of Small Things.

1. **The Prophesied Messiah was anointed for his prophetic ministry.**
2. **The Priest steps forward as our substitute.**
3. **The King works through small things like baptism.**

Grace and peace to you from the One who came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

During Advent, we meditated on message of John the Baptist, the voice of one calling out for people to repent and be baptized and prepare for the One more powerful than him, the One whose sandals he wasn't worthy to touch, the One who would come and baptize everyone with the Spirit and with fire, and would gather the wheat and burn the chaff. John prepared us for the day of big and epic things at the coming of Christ—his salvation and judgement. His message was no doubt true and inspired as it was the very thing for which John was born, to turn the heart of the parents toward their children before the great and dreadful Day of the Lord. Yet I believe even John, like the prophets before him who longed to see what they prophesied, thought that the day of big and glorious things is what would happen *next*.

But do you know what happens *next*? The heavens are torn wide open and the Messiah appears with his big winnowing fork, and all his angels, and salvation and fire and judgment. No! That's not what happens next. To this very day, we are still waiting for that to happen. The day of big things did not come next.

Next, came *the day of small things*. Matthew records what happens next, “**Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan.**” (13) which is quite a different picture--no winnowing fork, no fire and judgement. Jesus, John's unknown cousin, who had been living for the last 30 years in total anonymity as the son of a carpenter up in Podunk Nazareth, Galilee, came out to the muddy Jordan River to be baptized.

Let me give you some context about the Jordan River. Back in the Old Testament, the great Prophet Elijah's successor, Elisha had told a powerful man name Naaman, who was commander of the army of Aram and who had been afflicted with leprosy, to go wash in the Jordan and be healed. What did Naaman say? “Ain't no way I'm touching that water. There's way better rivers back home, and he went off in a rage. Naaman was looking for bigger things! He had said so himself, “**I thought Elisha**

would surely come out to me and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy.” (2 Kings 5:11). But a simple word of instruction from Elisha to wash in some measly water was not good or big enough for Naaman.

We are all prone by nature to want things to be more grand and glorious, but that’s not how God chooses to operate right now. For now he chooses humble and lowly means, even for his own Son. For now, God chooses the day of small things. In Zechariah 4:10, God had instructed the tiny little remnant of people that he was rebuilding not to **“despise the day of small things.”** So today we want to **celebrate the day of small things!** On this particular day, unknown Jesus, the Son of God through whom all things were made, who had humbled himself and taken on the nature of servant, came from lowly Galilee to be baptized in the backwater Jordan by camel skin John.

That’s the next part that initially doesn’t make a lot of sense to us, nor did it to John. **“John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you and do you come to me.” (15).** John realized this was backwards, upside down. Jesus was the Greater, John was the lesser; he was only the Forerunner. John was a sinner and baptism was for sinners, and that’s one thing Jesus was not! So why would the Son of God come to a baptism for sinners by a sinner?

Jesus gives his answer, **“Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15).** That word **“now,”** is kind of important. Jesus acknowledges that John’s logic makes some sense and one day it will be the day of big things, but not yet, not for now. On this day of small things, for now, Jesus was adamant and would not be deterred by John because he was there to fulfill every jot and tittle, every last stroke of a pen that was prophesied and written about the Messiah.

That word Messiah is the Hebrew title that means, “The Anointed One.” Very often, in the Old Testament, when God was giving a big task for a person to take on, like Elisha becoming a prophet, or Aaron, the brother of Moses becoming High Priest, or David becoming king, they would be anointed with oil for that office. But greater than all those people was the Anointed One, the Messiah who would come. God had promised through Isaiah in our first lesson, **“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him.” (Isaiah 42:1)** Why did the perfect Son of God insist on being baptized? The first reason is—the Anointed One needed to be anointed to fulfill the prophecy.

“Then John consented.” (15). Jesus, Lord of heaven and earth, was baptized with the lowly water of the Jordan by John. It’s the statue on our baptismal font. Right then we do get at least a little foretaste of something bigger and grander, and heaven does tear open a little. **“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.” (16)** On this day of small things, *1) Jesus the prophesied Messiah was anointed for his prophetic ministry.* Though he had been the Messiah all along, now he would go forth publicly to preach and teach and heal and reveal his identity as the Messiah. His baptism was **“how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.” (Acts 10:38).**

Next, we want to focus on what God the Father says about Jesus. The Spirit of God descended, **“and a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased.” (17).** Here the Father proclaims his love for his Son, and his Son’s obedience, his perfection, which is different than the way God was forced to speak about Israel, whom he had also called his son. In Hosea 11, God had said, **“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more they were called, the more they went away from me,” (Hosea 11:1)** which is a pretty fitting description of us as well, people whom God calls and instructs and go astray day after day.

So here at his baptism, which is for sinners, 2) *Jesus the perfect Son, our Great High Priest, is publicly stepping forward as our substitute.* God confirms that he is the perfect and worthy tribute to take the place of the rebellious son, the people of Israel and sinners like us. It is kind of like in those life-swap movies, like “Freaky Friday” or “Parent Trap,” where they change into each other’s lives. Except this is the great exchange of salvation. Jesus takes our life, and we get his! Sinners need baptism and Jesus stood where sinners belong, to be baptized not because he needed it, but because we needed it. That’s what Paul means when he says, **“God made him who had no sin, to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God!”** (2 Corinthians 5:21). So now, when God says of his Son, “With him I am well-pleased,” Jesus is doing what is necessary to make that true of you—one who is pleasing to God through Jesus!

What amazingly grand and big things that God is accomplishing through the *day of small things!* He has anointed and designated his Messiah. He has exchanged his righteous Son for the unrighteous one, and all of it he was pleased to do through word and water at the Jordan River. It was there that powerful men of the world like Naaman were disgusted to even set foot in the water, but not Jesus, our Prophet, Priest, and King. There he continued his active obedience, fulfilling all righteousness, and began his journey of passive obedience, as he would soon become obedient even to death on the cross. For now, 3) *our heavenly king insists to work through small things like baptism—*simple water connected with the word of promise.

You know, after Naaman got over his pride, he did actually turn out to be a pretty good object for the way water and the promise of God work together, like they do in baptism.. Naaman heard the instructions. **“Wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored.”** (2 Kings 5:10) And at first, he scoffed at that water and word of promise, but it was his lowly servants who called out his arrogance, **“If the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, ‘Wash and be cleansed’!”** (13) Brought to his senses, he dipped himself in the water seven times according to the promise and his flesh was cleansed. He was cleansed when he trusted the word of promise attached to water.

My dear friends, Jesus our King is still pleased and insists on working through small things like water and word of promise *given in baptism*, not to cleanse leprosy, but to wash away sin. Jesus, after living and suffering and dying and rising, before he went back into heaven, he reminded his followers he was King. **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”** Then he gave the command to baptize. **“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”** Matthew 28:19-20

In that small little thing called baptism, that looks like nothing at all, a handful of water and promise, God opens the floodgates of his blessings and pours them out on us like Niagara Falls- the Father’s favor and Spirit’s fervor, the washing of rebirth and renewal, the cleansing of sin and the soothing of a conscience, your adoption papers into the family of God, the spotless garments of salvation, the inheritance of God’s beloved children, and strength to die and rise every day of your life. Baptism saves you by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So we celebrate our baptism day, the day of small things, with all our hearts, because it’s the way God works for now until he comes again and brings us to his big, glorious kingdom. This weekend, we have the amazing privilege here at Mount Olive to baptize 6 people, all in the same family. It won’t be on Sportscenter later today, it won’t make the headlines tomorrow, but make no mistake. Heaven will be torn open as Jesus’ word of promise is spoken over simple water, and the Triune God, Father, Son, and

Spirit pours out the blessings of his grace. To him be our thanks and praise for *a day of small things*.
Amen.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.