

A SYMBOLIC ACT

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” —JOHN 1:29

John was baptizing people from all over the land who were repentant and looking for forgiveness of their sins. One day, at the Jordan River, Jesus joined the line up of people, waiting to be baptized. We know from Matthew’s Gospel that this took John by surprise. Matthew 3:14 says, “John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’” In other words, “If this is a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, what are You doing in the line of sinners?” Jesus had no sin and therefore no need of forgiveness. So why was Jesus baptized?

Isaiah 53:12 says of Jesus, “He was numbered with the transgressors.” This came to fulfillment on the cross, but it began at the outset of His ministry. Jesus lined up with everyone else to be baptized, identifying Himself with our sin and need to be forgiven. He is taking the place of the sinner, looking forward to what He later called ‘a baptism that I am to be baptized with’, which was His death, burial and resurrection.

Our baptism is identifying with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. Going down into the water is symbolic of dying with Christ; submerged in the water of being buried with Christ, and

coming out of the water being raised with Christ. The act of baptism is not something additional to the Gospel, but is a portrayal of the Gospel. The outward act was designed to portray the inner spiritual truth and reality of our union with Christ. Though we cannot attribute any virtue to the act of baptism itself as it does not unite us to Christ, it is an important event in the life of a believer, because it openly declares our union with Christ in such a way that what is true of Him becomes true of us.

Jesus Christ stepped into the place we deserve (the place of death), so that we might step into the place He alone deserves, which is the place of being totally right with the Father. His baptism is a foreshadowing of everything that is going to become the outworking of the Christian life. Our baptism looks back on what Christ made possible, and His baptism looks forward to what He has made possible. As a man on earth, the Holy Spirit operated in Him and through Him, bringing benefit and blessing to others. God is committed to the same process in us, and the act of baptism is symbolic of our union with Christ, which makes that possible. And being united to Christ is the essence of the Gospel.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for all You have done for us and given us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

TO REFLECT UPON: Is it time for me to be baptized?