

In this gospel scene, we find Jesus is there anonymously in the crowd, coming forward with the rest to meet the famous John the Baptist.

It is difficult for us to see him as an anonymous person; to us he stands out from every crowd and from the whole human race, we can't imagine him not yet majestic.

But there he is, the village man, Jesus, known only to his family and neighbors. He is not yet famous.

There is only one famous man there: John the Baptist. When we imagine a famous person among the crowds there is nearly always something false about it: he or she is looking for something, votes or applause or some other sort of ego-stroking.

But John the Baptist isn't looking for anything like that; he is delivering a verbal lashing about sin and hypocrisy.

Jesus is there, watching, listening, anonymous. He is one of the crowd. This is nothing new for him; this is how he has been all the thirty years of his life.

But this meeting with John the Baptist is a turning point. Something happened that would change his life forever, never to return home the same way.

+I had the honor many years ago, while I was at home, to baptize my younger brother's first child. I also had the honor of being one of the godparents. This was a bit tricky in the rite, for the priest (me) ask:

"Godparents are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents?" Then I had to run over and stand with the other godparent, responding "We are."

This role scenario also plays itself out with dual nature of Jesus. The emphasis of Christmas was about God becoming one with humanity.

However, the emphasis of this feast concerns Jesus' divinity and our identity with that divinity. Yes, he was born of a stable, in the straw and dirt of this world, to a woman.

But today, at the shores of the Jordan, everything changes. Today he is claimed by God. We have somewhat of a family reunion between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As God the Father calls out, "*My Beloved Son*" and the Holy Spirit descends upon him, as if embracing.

Many ask, "*If Jesus was God, why did he get baptized?*" I would say he was baptized precisely *because he is God.*

John baptized only symbolically with simple water representing a person's commitment to repent, to change their lives. The water did nothing to assist this, but only represented the hope that one might to do so (That is why it would be unlikely that John baptized babies.)

John practically says this himself, "*I am baptizing only with water (a symbol) He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*"

Jesus *does not* enter the water to be sanctified. No, he enters the water to *sanctify it*. He empowered the water to become no longer just an outward sign, but a vehicle of the Holy Spirit inner cleansing, rebirth, and transformation.

When Christ came out of that water, he replaces the symbol with *reality*, as it now *does what it symbolizes*. It is not just a symbol of love, it is love. It is not just a symbol for forgiveness, for it is forgiveness.

Did this somehow place Jesus 'above' the crowd? Would he no longer line up with them? On the contrary. He was now more than ever one of them. He spent the rest of his life seeking out the weak, the sick, the wounded, the strayed, the lost. He was for the lost sheep, the outcast, the sinner.

This has ever since been the mark of true greatness: to offer one's life to save the other.

Among us human beings there is usually a well-enforced pecking order: People who climb up a step are sure to make themselves visible in some way and sometimes they will even move into a different circle of friends and abandon the old circle. But Jesus *never* abandons the abandoned.

A pagan once asked the rabbi, "Why, of all things, did God choose the thorny thorn bush as the place from which to speak to Moses?" The rabbi replied, "*God chose the humble thorn bush to teach you there is no place on earth bereft of the divine presence, not even the thorn bush.*"

Just takes this to another level, as he walked into the muddy water of human sin and failure and grasp our hands in our baptism, like rescuing someone who is drowning (in our case, in our sins).

He pulls us from the waters and blows the air of the Holy Spirit into our lungs just as God had done with Adam. This, however, is the breath of eternal life.

Jesus walked into the muddy waters of the Jordan just as Joshua did centuries before, leading his people from the desert to the Promise Land. After our baptism, we are placed in our parent's arms (unless, adults!) that we will one day be returned to the Father and enter the Promised Land of the Kingdom of God.

Someone once said that Jesus went to the cross so that we too could hear the same words Jesus heard at his baptism - so that you and I can hear, "This is my beloved daughter/this is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased."

Jesus walked into the waters of the Jordan to identify totally with his people. But in doing so, he gives us our identity *too*. It reminds us of *who we are* and *whose we are*.

Through our baptism we have been defined *forever* as God's children and the only one who can *deface* or weaken that dignity that has been given to us, is we, *ourselves*. However, no matter what we do to ourselves, or place ourselves, we will always be His *Beloved*...