



## **generate a sermon about the orthodox view of Jesus' baptism as found in Isaiah 42:1-9 and Matthew 3:13-17**

Jesus' baptism reveals him as the beloved Son, the Spirit-bearing Servant, and the One who begins to "fulfill all righteousness" for the life of the world. These two passages let the Church see the Jordan as the moment when the Servant of Isaiah steps into the waters to inaugurate his saving ministry and to sanctify baptism for all who will follow him.

### **Setting the scene at the Jordan**

Matthew tells us that Jesus comes from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John, who is calling Israel to repentance. John is stunned: "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" (Matthew 3:14). Jesus answers, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

A sermon could begin here by stressing:

- Jesus does not come as one more sinner in the line, but as the sinless One who willingly stands where sinners stand.
- He steps into the water not because he needs cleansing, but to begin bearing the burden of those who do.

The Orthodox tradition loves to sing on Theophany (the feast of the Lord's Baptism): "He who has no sin, yet is baptized in the Jordan, that He might sanctify the waters." The point is not that he is washed, but that everything he touches is washed by him.

### **Jesus as the Servant of Isaiah 42**

Isaiah 42:1-9 speaks of a mysterious "Servant":

"Behold my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
I have put my Spirit upon him;  
he will bring forth justice to the nations." (Isaiah 42:1)

At the Jordan, this prophecy is fulfilled before our eyes.

- In Isaiah, God promises a chosen Servant, upheld by God, in whom God delights.

- In Matthew, as Jesus comes up from the water, the heavens are opened, the Spirit descends like a dove, and the Father declares: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

The Orthodox reading is simple and profound: what Isaiah foresaw, Matthew shows. The "Servant" is the "Son"; the one in whom God delights is the one on whom the Spirit rests at the Jordan. The baptism is therefore not only the start of Jesus' public ministry; it is the public unveiling of the Servant-King who will bring gentle justice to the nations, open blind eyes, and free prisoners from their dungeons (Isaiah 42:6–7).

### **"To fulfill all righteousness"**

The key phrase in Matthew's account is Jesus' explanation: "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

From an Orthodox standpoint, this can be preached in at least three dimensions:

#### **1. Righteousness as obedience**

Jesus submits to the Father's will at every step. His baptism is his first public "Yes" that looks ahead to Gethsemane and the Cross. The righteous One stands with the unrighteous, not at a distance from them.

#### **2. Righteousness as identification**

In Isaiah 42, the Servant is "given as a covenant to the people" (Isaiah 42:6). At the Jordan, Christ identifies himself fully with Israel, and through Israel, with all humanity. He steps into our story so that we may be written into his.

#### **3. Righteousness as new creation**

Isaiah speaks of "new things" that God declares (Isaiah 42:9). The Spirit hovering over the waters of the Jordan echoes the Spirit hovering over the waters at creation. In Jesus' baptism, the Church sees the beginning of a new creation in which water, humanity, and the whole cosmos are being restored.

So a sermon can say: Christ fulfills all righteousness by perfect obedience, by perfect solidarity, and by beginning the restoration of creation itself.

### **The revealing of the Trinity**

The Orthodox Church calls this feast "Theophany" or "Epiphany" – the manifestation of God.

At the Jordan:

- The Father speaks from heaven.
- The Son stands in the water, being baptized.
- The Holy Spirit descends in bodily form "like a dove."

This is not a theory but a revelation in history. A sermon can linger here:

- The God confessed in the Creed is not an abstract power, but the living communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, revealed in love.

- The Son's humility in the water, the Spirit's gentle descent, and the Father's delighted voice show that salvation is an act of the whole Trinity.

Every Orthodox baptism echoes this: it is done "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" because the same Trinity who was present at the Jordan is present over the font.

## **Jesus' baptism and ours**

Isaiah 42 shows the Servant as "a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon" (Isaiah 42:6-7). In the Orthodox understanding, Jesus does not simply show us what baptism looks like; he turns baptism into the door of this liberation.

Preaching can draw several lines from his baptism to ours:

### **1. From his waters to our waters**

Because Christ entered the Jordan, the waters of baptism are no longer ordinary. They become, in the words of the Church's hymnody, "the waters of Jordan for the regeneration of all." When someone is immersed into that water, they are united to Christ's own death and resurrection, buried and raised with him, clothed in him, and given the gift of the Holy Spirit.

### **2. From his calling to our calling**

The voice from heaven says to Jesus, "This is my beloved Son." In Christ, the baptized receive the same address: "You are my beloved child." The Orthodox spiritual tradition constantly returns to this: the Christian life is learning to live from baptismal identity, resisting every other name – sinner, failure, forgotten – and standing in the truth that in Christ we have been claimed and named by God.

### **3. From his mission to our mission**

The Servant brings justice without breaking the bruised reed or quenching the faintly burning wick (Isaiah 42:3). The baptized share that task. Having passed through the waters with Christ, they are sent back into the world to:

- Carry his gentleness into harsh places.
- Be a light in dark corners.
- Help open blind eyes and loosen chains – through mercy, truth-telling, forgiveness, and patient love.

A very concrete homiletic move is to ask: "Where are the bruised reeds and smoldering wicks in your life? In your family, parish, workplace? How does your baptismal union with Christ call you to treat them?"

## **Pastoral exhortation**

The sermon might end with a direct word to the hearers:

- Remember your baptism as your Jordan. Even if you were an infant, the same Spirit descended, the same Trinity acted, the same voice of delight was spoken over you.
- Return to the waters every day by repentance. Confess sins, renounce the old life, and reclaim the promise that you have died and risen with Christ.

- Live as a servant in the image of the Servant: gentle, steadfast, hopeful. Refuse to crush the weak or to despise the small beginnings of grace in others.

In Jesus' baptism, heaven opened once. In the life of the baptized, heaven stands open still. The Father delights to call his people "beloved," the Son walks with them in every river they must cross, and the Holy Spirit rests upon them so that, in a world of dungeons and blindness, they may walk as children of the light.



1. <https://www.saintjohnchurch.org/orthodox-baptism-newness-of-life/>
2. <https://www.emmanuelalbany.net/sermons-full/2020/1/18/11220-beloved-isaiah-421-9-matthew-313-17>
3. <https://www.christiancentury.org/lectionary/january-11-baptism-isaiah-42-1-9-matthew-3-13-17>
4. <https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/baptism>
5. <https://www.heritagepres.com/sunday-sermon-claimed-matthew-313-17-isaiah-421-9/>
6. <https://myocn.net/the-significance-of-the-baptism-of-jesus-christ-in-the-jordan/>
7. <https://www.1517.org/articles/old-testament-isaiah-421-9-the-baptism-of-our-lord-series-a-2026>
8. <https://orthodoxwiki.org/Baptism>
9. <https://www.scottsbluffpres.org/2023/01/11/chosen-choosing-beloved-isaiah-421-9-matthew-313-17/>
10. [https://www.goarch.org/products/lessons/-/asset\\_publisher/27rNTuWkZ1g7/content/the-baptism-of-jesus](https://www.goarch.org/products/lessons/-/asset_publisher/27rNTuWkZ1g7/content/the-baptism-of-jesus)