



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

An “unorthodox” way to preach these texts is to see Jesus’ baptism not as a brief, private ceremony, but as the public launching of a quiet revolution in how God uses power, brings justice, and names belovedness. Isaiah 42:1-9 and Matthew 3:13-17 together show Jesus stepping into the water not because he needs cleansing, but because he is choosing to stand in complete solidarity with sinners and to inaugurate a new kind of kingdom.^{[1] [2] [3]}

The Servant Steps into the Water

Isaiah speaks of a **servant** God upholds, God’s chosen one in whom God delights, on whom God puts the Spirit to bring justice to the nations. At the Jordan, Matthew shows that servant stepping out of the crowd, indistinguishable at first from every other person waiting to confess and be washed.^{[2] [3] [4] [5]}

- The one promised in Isaiah as Spirit-filled and justice-bringing does not arrive with fanfare, but in a muddy river among the guilty.^{[4] [2]}
- The One in whom God “delights” in Isaiah is echoed by the voice from heaven: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”^{[3] [5]}

Here is the unorthodox view: Jesus’ baptism is not God reluctantly letting him “borrow” a ritual meant for sinners. It is Jesus willingly entering a line he does not need to stand in, to take on an identity he does not deserve, so that those who do deserve it might go free.^{[1] [3]}

A Strange Argument in the River

Matthew alone records the awkward conversation: John tries to stop Jesus. “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” John is right: Jesus has no sins to confess, nothing to repent of.^{[6] [7] [3]}

- Many have called this a “messianic embarrassment”: if the Messiah is sinless, why submit to a baptism for repentance at all?^{[6] [3]}
- Jesus’ answer is startlingly brief: “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.”^{[3] [6]}

In other words, Jesus is not in the water because he lacks righteousness, but because righteousness, as God defines it, means going all the way down into the place where sinners stand, so that none of them will ever stand there alone. The unorthodox view is this:

righteousness here is not first about moral bookkeeping; it is about radical identification. The Holy One chooses to be counted among the unholy.^{[1] [3]}

Justice without Crushing the Bruised

Isaiah's servant will "bring forth justice," but not like every other ruler. He will not cry out or shout, nor break a bruised reed or quench a faintly burning wick. Many people long for justice, but fear that when it comes, it will flatten them too. Isaiah says: this servant's justice mends what is bruised and rekindles what is barely burning.^[2]

- At the Jordan, Jesus stands in the water with bruised reeds and smoldering wicks—people beaten down by sin, shame, and religious failure.^{[8] [4]}
- Instead of separating himself from them, he allows himself to be numbered among them, so that his justice will not fall on them but fall for them.^{[2] [1]}

This is unorthodox power. The one who could rightly stand on the bank and judge the line, gets in the line. The one who will one day judge the nations first chooses to be immersed under the same water as the guilty.^{[3] [1] [2]}

A New Identity Spoken over the Crowd

When Jesus comes up from the water, the heavens are opened, the Spirit descends like a dove, and a voice declares: "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Those words echo Isaiah's "my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights."^{[5] [2] [3]}

- God is not whispering privately to Jesus as he hides from the crowd; God is announcing publicly who Jesus is, for the sake of the watching world.^{[7] [3]}
- In Christ, that same word of belovedness is extended to all who are joined to him in baptism: chosen, delighted in, claimed.^{[8] [5]}

Here is the unorthodox twist: at the very moment Jesus stands where sinners stand, God announces that this is the place where belovedness is revealed. The spot everyone assumed marked failure and shame becomes the platform from which God declares pleasure and delight.^{[8] [1] [3]}

Living the Baptismal Revolution

If Isaiah 42 and Matthew 3 are read together, Jesus' baptism becomes the opening scene of a servant mission that the church is called to share. Baptism is not just a personal spiritual milestone; it is a public enlistment into this same pattern of humble solidarity and Spirit-filled service.^{[9] [4] [5] [7] [2]}

- To follow the baptized Jesus is to move toward the places where people are ashamed, afraid, and written off, and to stand there with them instead of shouting at them from the safe shore.^{[4] [8]}
- It is to practice justice that does not crush bruised reeds or snuff out weak flames, but patiently binds up, rekindles, and restores.^{[5] [2]}

- It is to hear over your life, again and again, the same word spoken over Christ: "Beloved," not because you have no sin, but because you are in the One who chose to stand in the water for you. ^[5] ^[3] ^[8]

So the unorthodox view is also the deeply biblical one: in Jesus' baptism, God is not lowering Jesus to our level so reluctantly that he can get to "real ministry" later. God is showing that standing with sinners, carrying their shame, and pouring out gentle justice on their behalf is the very heart of his mission from the beginning. ^[1] ^[2] ^[3]

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5. <https://www.aplainaccount.org/post/disc-isaiah-42-1-9>
6. <https://firstpresconcord.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Baptized-in-Water.pdf>
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