Our Gospel passage today has Jesus traveling from Galilee to the Jordan to seek out John the Baptist in order to be baptized. It is a passage very familiar to all of us; one so familiar that we may fail to realize how peculiar it is...

**It begs the question: why did Jesus need to be baptized?**

- Jesus was sinless... he didn’t need John’s Baptism of Repentance.
- He was born as the Son of God... he didn’t need adoption.
- He was miraculously conceived by the power of Holy Spirit and didn’t need the gift of the Spirit!
- So why did he need to be baptized?

Jesus comes to John along side the Jordan river and requests Baptism, but John protests saying “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

You see John had just been preaching that there was one greater than he who was coming, someone so great he was even unworthy to carry his sandals... he said:

11 “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

But Jesus countered his protest and said it was proper in order to fulfill all righteousness and then John consented. This is a very interesting and seemingly contradictory interaction. For surely Jesus did not need to be baptized. And it was John who needed a savior and not Jesus. Surely John was right in saying “I need to be baptized by you,” and yet Jesus, the **Righteous One**, humbled himself in obedience to the Father and was baptized by the sinner, to supposedly to **fulfill all righteousness**. How Intriguing.

John was reluctant to baptize Jesus because he recognized that Jesus was the one man who had no need for repentance – Jesus had no need to prepare himself for the coming of the Lord, the coming King, for Jesus was himself the King!
But John relented in order to fulfill all righteousness... what does that mean? I think the key to understanding this passage is in this statement: **to fulfill all righteousness.** In the book of Matthew Jesus teaches that God requires perfect holiness, perfect righteousness. But as the scriptures confirm:

“There is no one righteous, not even one;
11 there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.
12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good, not even one.”

Jesus had to come and somehow bear the guilt of the world. He had to do what all the Old Testament Priest of old were unable to do and bear the sins of the world. For none of the sacrifices of old could ever take away a persons sin or they would not have had to be performed day after day, over and over.

Jesus empathized with our situation. He realized we needed a person to come and remove the stain of our unrighteousness, he knew he had to come to earth and be a man and take upon himself the sin of the world. He had to be that suffering servant of **Isaiah 53:**

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

And Jesus had to be identified with his people in the removal of their sins.

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. **Hebrews 4:15**

Ultimately John’s baptism of repentance points to our need of repentance, our need for cleansing, and our need for punishment. Which in turn points
ultimately to Jesus’ death on the cross which incidentally Jesus himself called in Luke 12:50 his Baptism:

*But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!*

Christ baptism on the cross was of course the only baptism that actually removed sin from mankind. We call this his passion; an atoning sacrifice for us. His suffering and death was the greatest act of his humiliation which began at his birth. For God, the eternal creator of heaven and earth, left his throne, humbled himself and become a creature, a man, and walked this earth with us so that he could be the righteous one, the advocate of man, that suffering servant of Isaiah 53, and then humbled himself further by submitting himself to death, even death on a cross, for the salvation of mankind.

**1 John 2 begins:**

*My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*

Jesus identified with us, he walked the earth like do, and even took upon himself the humble symbol of a sinner’s repentance; John’s Baptism. Jesus baptism became a promise of our salvation, his baptism on the cross for us, his being anointed with the spirit for our sake and his victory over temptation on our behalf.

Jesus taught that God requires perfect righteousness, and he secured that perfect righteousness for sinners... for us all.

His baptism pointed to his death as a ransom for many and it showed the perfect obedience by which he would fulfill all righteousness on our behalf.

I asked why did Jesus have to be baptized if he was sinless, if he was righteous... he did it to identify with us in his humiliation, he did it to fulfill the perfect righteousness that God required of us, on our behalf, and to direct us to our own baptism by the spirit, our adoption as sons.

John’s baptism was different from Christian baptism since it looked forward to Christ’s coming. It was a baptism of repentance – a preparation – to
prepare the people for the coming of their Lord. It looked forward to Christ. After Christ was baptized by John, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus and anointed him for his mission of redemption.

For Christians, our baptism today looks back at Christ’s Baptism on the cross and it unites us to him in his death, burial and resurrection. And as the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, our Christian baptism is ultimately an act of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is poured out upon us and cleanses us from all our sin. He is poured out upon us so that we can repent, turn to God and believe and receive everlasting life. He is poured out upon us so we can continue the mission of Christ and bring the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the world!

The Baptism of the Spirit is our real baptism. Water Baptism is only a sign and a seal of a greater reality. Just as John’s baptism looked forward to Christ’s work on the cross, our Baptism looks back to that work on the cross and represents for us being united with him in His baptism.

Christian baptism today lays claim on behalf of the one baptized to the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. For those who are baptized as children it looks forward to a day when the Holy Spirit does its work in our lives and redeems us and unites us to Christ in his baptism. It comforts parents with a Covenantal Promise, that their Children one day may believe and be saved.

For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.

For those of us who were baptized after their coming to faith, our baptism looks back on the reality of the Spirit’s work and comforts us in that same covenantal promise: that we are bound with Christ, united to him in his death, burial and resurrection. And as he was raised, we too will be raised, even if we die in this life, we will be raised to newness of life.

I asked why did Jesus need to be baptized... he did it for you!

And now the remission of sins and the garment of righteousness are given through faith in Jesus Christ. For... Those who lack God’s righteousness but hunger and thirst for it will be filled. Those who struggle under the burden of sin will find their rest in Him.