

Kings don't associate with the common people. Presidents don't eat lunch in the cafeteria. Famous movie stars don't come and hang out at the local bowling alley. Certain groups of people just don't associate with other groups of people. A certain distance is kept, a certain disconnect is maintained naturally because of differences.

No one noticed when these two men of destiny stood face to face. Who would have? One was a preacher in the wilderness who some thought was crazy. The other was a virtual unknown, a man from a town in Galilee but was born in Bethlehem. All that wasn't known and wasn't important to any of the people who were there for the chance encounter. But these two men noticed. In fact they knew something big was happening. Many things would change after this day.

Though no one could see it outwardly one of these men was of very high station. His presence here on the banks of the Jordan River was unprecedented and unexpected. And yet as Matthew records in the gospel, he had come to reveal himself. All throughout this season called Epiphany we'll look at the Power of the Light. Today...

The Light is revealed
His baptism shows his power
His Father declares his power

My sister and her husband keep a calendar hanging on the refrigerator. Not only does it help teach their children days of the week, it also serves as their activities calendar. Everything goes on there from meals for that week to the places they need to be. You probably have your own way of keeping your calendar. Mine is my computer Outlook calendar and my phone synced together. When it says it's time for an appointment, then it's time.

For thirty years Jesus had lived a normal looking life. He probably had chores at home when he was younger. He most likely would've helped his father with his work as a carpenter. He would have accompanied his parents to worship at their local church. But Matthew records the moment that all changed. **"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John."** That's a bit low-key. More like, the time was now, the time had arrived. Jesus' main purpose was changing and it was time to get to it.

Jesus showed up willingly along the banks of the Jordan River to be baptized. He wasn't forced and certainly didn't need what John's baptisms were giving. Sinners came to be baptized, repentant sinners who were hearing good news from God. John applied water and declared God had washed their sins away. But when Jesus took his turn in the line John had a problem. He recognized Jesus, not just as some distant relative he'd seen at family gatherings, but as the sinless Son of God. **"But John tried to deter him, saying, I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"** With a little bit of force John said no. John was the sinful one here, not Jesus. John was the one who needed cleansing in this baptismal water, not Jesus. John was the lesser, how could he baptize the greater? John had been expecting a Son of God with power. This wasn't it.

I see myself in John, standing in the water, wishing Jesus wouldn't be asking what he's asking. I try to protest Jesus identifying himself with sinners. Sinners are all around, including this morning. We want to see power, but all we see is the one we expect to rise above actually sink in and get baptized like an ordinary sinful man who needs it. It's not the kind of power I expect. You too expected a different kind of power, an amazing miracle, a commanding presence riding a strong horse, anything that signified power to us. This supposed Savior identifies so closely with those he came to save. He gets down in the muck. Wasn't he here to get us out of the muck and make life better for us all? That's the kind of Savior I want, a powerful, kingly looking savior, who makes my life easier and gets rid of anything that would be against me.

The time was right. Jesus was in control. **"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."** Jesus was willingly and powerfully submitting to baptism to align himself with sinners, declaring himself one with sinners. He puts himself forward as the Redeemer of the world. He steps to your side to let you know he's been there. He takes on the role and work he was born to do. He would live a life like you and me, except his without sin. His life would be perfect. He alone could say I've lived just like you, but I conquered it all for you. His baptism showed to the world his power to defeat sin and death for sinners.

So trying to stop Jesus from being baptized, or thinking we need a different looking savior, is exactly the opposite of what we need. **"Let it be so now."** Jesus calmly, but with power, reveals himself as the Light. His baptism shows his power. He's doing what is necessary to save us. He's always been doing what's necessary to save us. His power is in his humility which he demonstrated by getting into the water and associating in the closest way possibly with sinners like you and me. His power is his willingness to step forward and take this burden of sin. We're empowered by the power we see in the Light, power in Christ to live our life for him.

When someone is appointed for a task the leader gives a show of authority to demonstrate that the appointed is authorized to exercise that leader's power. Maybe it's a seal, or a handshake for the cameras, or a letter sent out. Something has to tell others that this power and authority has now been given to someone else. God doesn't give seals or handshakes. He opens the heavens.

It's safe to assume that heaven opening is reserved for special occasions. Here it signals God's declaration of his Son's power. God officially approved of the work Jesus was doing and the power he was showing. **"As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him."** This was God's guy, his Son, the Savior he sent. The waters of baptism were important to identify Jesus with sinful human beings. The Spirit of God descending on Jesus was also important. The Son had submitted completely to the plan of salvation. It called for him to enter the ranks of sinners to save sinners.

The time was right for this moment. God had been planning for it since before the world was created. All three persons of the Trinity participated. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, was plainly the one baptized. God the Father, the first person of the Trinity, was speaking from heaven. God the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, was descending looking like a dove on Jesus. Three persons, one God, each revealed the glory, power, and authority now resting on Jesus.

The heavens were opened, Jesus was revealed as the Light of the world, and God was pleased. **"And a voice from heaven said, This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."** The substitute was here. He would live the perfect life that counted for you. Because Jesus was your substitute his perfect life counts as your perfect life. Jesus gives it to you as a gift. Now God sees you as having lived perfectly, keeping every law and rule, never disobeying once. Jesus lived to be seen as a sinner by God so you would never be seen as a sinner by God. And the heavenly Father was pleased with the work of his Son.

This Son born in Bethlehem was in every way God with us. He came to identify with us closely and in the most personal way. It is essential for us to hear and believe. Christ Jesus really did come to be with us and save us. God approved it, the Holy Spirit anointed him for it, and Jesus carried it out. He stood under the waters of baptism so he could truly be one of us. His baptism marked and approved his saving work. We're motivated by his love and completed work for us to thank him. We praise God for his powerful work and glorious plan. We thank Jesus for being baptized and setting out to live a perfect life for us all.

It isn't normal for the king to spend much time living among his subjects. In this case it was necessary. Jesus had all the power and still does. That shows us his grace. He willingly stood in for us starting with baptism. He announced to the world the work of saving people had begun. It wouldn't end until every law was kept perfectly and every sinner had their substitute. Jesus is that substitute. He is the Light. That Light is revealed to us today and his baptism and his Father shows and declares the Power of the Light.