MT. ROSE REFORMED
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

To Fulfill All Righteousness

Reverend Scott Johnson | November 22, 2026 | Matthew 3:13-17

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 42:1-9

The Old Testament reading is Isaiah chapter 42, verses 1 through 9, and this is the infallible and inerrant Word of God. 42, 1 through 9.

"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. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice or make it heard in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench. He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth, and the coastlands wait for his law.

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it. I am the Lord. I have called you in righteousness. I will take you by the hand and keep you. I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord, that is my name. My glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare. Before they spring forth, I tell you of them."

New Testament Reading: Matthew 3:13-17

And now let's turn to Matthew chapter three, Matthew three, verses 13 through 17. This is our New Testament reading. This is also our sermon text for this morning. Matthew 3, verses 13 through 17.

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him saying, 'I need to be baptized by you and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him. And behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'"

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Introduction: The Inauguration of Jesus Christ

As you know, every four years in our country, we have a new president or a new president, re-elected president, who formally and officially, publicly takes an oath whereby he swears to fulfill the duties of the office of president, that office to which he was elected by the people. And we call this his inauguration.

The baptism of Jesus, which we are considering today, was also a kind of inauguration ceremony. From all eternity, the Son of God had been appointed, elected, you might say, not by the people, but by God the Father. He was appointed from eternity to fulfill the offices of prophet, priest, and king for our salvation. And when the fullness of time had come, the Son of God came into our world in order to fulfill this ministry of our redemption.

And for the first 30 years or so of his life, Jesus lived in relative obscurity. He lived in the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He was the son of a carpenter, so presumably he was taken up with the trade of carpentry for that part of his life. But with our passage this morning, the time has come for Jesus to formally enter into his public ministry as the savior of sinners. The time has come for Him to take up and to fulfill that office of Redeemer, the Redeemer of the world, the Redeemer of the people of God and the Lord of all.

And the official commencements of Jesus taking up that ministry and office, or we might say the inauguration of Jesus Christ as our Savior, was His baptism by John in the River Jordan. Thankfully, unlike with our presidents, Jesus fulfilled his office perfectly, and he continues to fulfill that office perfectly. And thankfully, there will only be one inauguration of Jesus Christ, and that's because he will continue to be the Lord and Savior of the world until the end of time.

And as we look at this passage this morning, we'll first consider three parts of it: the baptism of Jesus, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus, and thirdly, the voice of the Father speaking from heaven. And after that, we'll draw three lessons from this passage this morning.

The Baptism of Jesus

So first of all, the baptism of Jesus. When Jesus came to John the Baptist and told John that he needed to be baptized by him, I think it's safe to say that that was the very last thing that John was expecting to hear from Jesus. As we saw last week, John was fulfilling his prophetic ministry to herald the coming of the Christ. He was out in the wilderness of Judea. He was declaring to the people that there was one coming after him who was mightier than he, one whose sandals he was not worthy to carry. And of course, John was speaking about Christ. He was speaking about Jesus.

And John was preaching to all the people of Israel that the Christ would be coming with a baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire, which means that his baptism would be a baptism of salvation for those who would receive him in faith, for those who would repent of their sins, they would be baptized by the Spirit for salvation. But for those who did not repent of their sins, according to John's preaching, the Christ would come with a severe judgment, a baptism of fire, that is the unquenchable fire of God's wrath. And so John says in verse 12 of chapter 3, "His winnowing fork is in his hand and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." And so John is preaching the coming of Christ, that he is coming to judge the unrepentant with the fire of God from heaven.

And with that in mind, what we would have expected Matthew to write next in his gospel is something like this: "Then Jesus came from Galilee with his winnowing fork in his hand, and he began to clear his threshing floor, destroying sinners with the judgment of fire from heaven." But, of course, that's not what Matthew has actually written in the Gospel.

But what he actually wrote is this: Now, based on John's preaching, this was, to put it mildly, unexpected. Very much a surprise. And no one would have been more surprised than John himself. We can only imagine what John's initial reaction might have been when Jesus came to him and told him that he had to baptize him. Maybe John sat down on the ground, speechless, like someone who just heard some shocking and disturbing news. Or maybe John was utterly confused. Maybe he said to Jesus, "I'm sorry, Lord, but I could swear it sounded like you just told me that I need to baptize you. Surely that's not what you said."

Well, we don't know what John thought at first, but what Matthew does tell us is that John tried to stop Jesus from being baptized by him. In verse 14, we read, "John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you and do you come to me?'" In other words, John was saying to Jesus, "If there is anybody here that needs to be baptized, it is me. I am the sinful one. I am a sinner, but you, Lord, are the righteous judge of sinners, and yet you are coming to me to be baptized by me with a baptism of repentance."

And we might share in John's confusion. Why should Jesus receive the baptism of John, the baptism of repentance? Why would the sinless son of God, who was without sin and impurity and unrighteousness, why should he receive a baptism of repentance? Why should he need to repent? He had nothing to repent of.

And the answer to that question is in what Jesus says to John in response. To John's resistance, Jesus says in verse 15, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." And so what Jesus meant here by righteousness is the will of God, specifically the will of God for Jesus, what he was supposed to do according to God's will in order to bring about the salvation of God's people.

And so, God's will, or what was righteousness, was that Jesus, who came to bring salvation to sinners through his life, suffering, death, and resurrection, that he should also fully identify himself with those whom he came to save. And the way in which Jesus would fully identify himself with his people, the way in which he would publicly declare that he was one with us, even in our sin, although he was free from sin, was that he would undergo the baptism of John, which was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And so by being baptized by John, Jesus was declaring that he was in solidarity with those whom he came to save. It was a statement that though he himself was sinless, he would be counted among sinners such as us.

And so, think about it. If anybody had been walking by the River Jordan at that time, and they did not know who Jesus was, and they saw John in the River Jordan baptizing Jesus, they would have thought to themselves, "Well, there's another sinner going out to John the Baptist to be baptized for the repentance of his sins. I wonder what sins he has to repent of." One author said this, he said, "It is well known that Jesus ends his ministry on a cross between thieves. It deserves to be as well known that he begins his ministry in a river among sinners."

And so Jesus, by being baptized, though he was and continues to be the sinless son of God, he fully identified with you and me in our sin and in our need. He said, "I am one with you." Even

though he was without sin, he could say, "I am one with you, even in your sin." And he did this ultimately so that he could stand in our place to receive a much more terrible baptism. And that is the baptism which he underwent when he hung upon the cross and endured the wrath and the judgment of God for your sin and for my sin, that we might be forgiven. And so this is why Jesus was baptized by John: so that he could represent us, so that he could be one with us and do that work of redemption in which he takes away our sin, so he could identify with us in our sin.

The Descent of the Holy Spirit

You know, after Jesus was baptized, he went up from the water, and Matthew tells us in verse 16 that, "Behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him." And so part of this inauguration ceremony, the baptism of Jesus, was the Holy Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove and resting upon the Lord. And one thing that this meant was that God was giving in this way his testimony to the world, his witness to the world, that this Jesus, he was indeed the Christ. He was the Messiah.

And we know that because of what we read from the Old Testament. Our Old Testament reading this morning was from Isaiah chapter 42. And in that passage, Isaiah is speaking of the coming servant of the Lord. And when Isaiah speaks of the servant of the Lord, he is speaking of the coming Christ. And Isaiah is speaking in Isaiah 42. He is declaring the words of God himself. And in that prophecy, God declares through Isaiah the prophet that his servants, his servant will bring forth justice to the nations. He will also bring light, that is salvation, to the nations. And in order to empower him, to enable him, his servant to carry out this office, this ministry of salvation, the Spirit will be given to him. God will give his servant the Spirit. And so in Isaiah 42, verse one, it says that he will put his Spirit upon him.

And we read this in different places in Isaiah. In Isaiah chapter 11, Isaiah says this about the coming Christ. Isaiah 11, 12: "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." And then one other place in Isaiah's prophecy, we read this in Isaiah 61 verse one about—these are the words of the servant of Christ himself, Isaiah 61 one: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound."

And so he put all of this together, and what it means is this: that when the Holy Spirit, at the baptism of Jesus, when the Spirit descended from heaven in the form of a dove upon the Lord Jesus and came to rest on Him, it was in fulfillment of these prophecies that the Christ would be given the Spirit of God in order to accomplish all that saving work that the Father had given to Him to accomplish. And so the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus was both God's testimony that this was the Christ and it was God's anointing. It was God's anointing with the Spirit to enable Christ to carry out His ministry and His office as the Savior of the world, the Christ.

And when we consider who Christ is, we can see why God gave him his spirit, because Christ is both man and God. He is the incarnation of the son of God. He is truly divine, but he is also truly human. And according to his human nature, he needed the empowering work of the Holy Spirit to enable him to carry out his ministry as man. And so all that Jesus did—his teaching, his miracles, his obedience, his suffering for our sins—all of this Jesus did only as he was filled with the Spirit, enabled by the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, the Spirit whom God has given to him without measure. And so this is why at his inauguration, the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus receives the Spirit of God.

And there's such a beautiful picture that Matthew gives us here of the Holy Spirit coming down on Jesus. Matthew says, and other gospel writers say as well, it is like the Spirit was like a dove descending on him and coming to rest on him. And this image of the Spirit of God coming down from heaven in the form of a dove—this is meant to bring to our minds the very opening verses of the Bible in Genesis. In those verses, we read that the creation of the heavens and the earth, that the spirit of God was hovering bird-like over the face of the waters.

And so what Matthew was telling us is this: that just as the Holy Spirit was active in God's work of creation, so now the Holy Spirit was active in God's work of recreation. And God's work of recreation is that work of redemption that he accomplished and is continuing to fulfill through Jesus Christ, to redeem a people for himself, to renew a people for himself, to redeem a people to live in a redeemed and renewed creation. And so the Spirit coming down on Jesus like a dove, this meant the beginning of a new work of God, a work of God that it was every bit as wonderful and magnificent and momentous as the work of creation itself: God's work of recreation, renewal, salvation, restoration for a fallen creation.

The Voice of the Father from Heaven

And that brings us to the last part of this inauguration ceremony, and that is the voice of God the Father thundering from heaven. Matthew says in verse 17, "And behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.'" And so just as the Old Testament revealed to the people of Israel that the coming Christ would be one who was anointed with the Holy Spirit, also the Old Testament revealed that the coming Christ would be the son of God, the very son of God, the son whom God would publicly declare, "This is my son."

And we read that in Psalm 2. In Psalm 2, verses 7 and 8, it says this: "I will tell of the decree, of the decree. The Lord said to me, 'You are my son. Today I have begotten you. Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession.'" And so what that means is that when the voice of the father from heaven declared, "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased," the father was, as it were, giving his son his divine commission to fulfill his offices of the Christ, to establish his rule and kingdom over the nations, that rule and kingdom over the nations, which is a rule of salvation for the people of God.

Now, the fact that it was Jesus whom God appointed—it was his Son whom he commissioned in order to fulfill this saving purpose of God—what this means is that everything that Jesus said and did throughout his earthly ministry, it was a true revelation of God the Father. We can put it this way: God the Father committed the entirety of his revealing and saving work to his son, Jesus Christ. And what that means is this: that when we hear the words of Jesus, when we see the works of Jesus, when we behold the character of Jesus, we are hearing and seeing and beholding the words and the works and the character of God the Father himself. In other words, there is not some mysterious God standing behind Jesus of whom we do not know, but Jesus reveals fully the character, the person, the work, the will of the Father in all that he does. And Jesus said as much when he said in John 10, 10:30, "I and the Father are one."

And in fact, we can go even further than that. We have in this passage a marvelous picture of who God is as triune. God is a trinity. He is one God, one in being, one in substance, one in essence, and yet God is three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. And we see here in the baptism of Jesus that all three persons of the Godhead take part in the work of salvation. And so our salvation is the work of one God, the one true God. And yet each person of the Godhead fulfills a distinct role in our salvation. The father has appointed his son to be the one to accomplish the salvation that the father willed from all eternity. Jesus accomplished that work of salvation in time when he came into our world and suffered and died to take away our sins. And he was enabled to do all that he did by the presence and the power

of the Holy Spirit who dwelt in him. And we could say the same thing, not only about God's works of redemption, but God's works of creation, God's works of providence. In all that he does, he works as a Trinity, one God, but three persons all taking part in the one work of God.

I love the way J.C. Ryle, the commentator, puts this, commenting on this passage. He says—and one thing that this means for us as we reflect upon this truth that God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all work as one in order to bring us salvation—it means this: that we can have absolute certainty of our salvation. And why is that? It's because God the Father cannot fail to accomplish his eternal purposes for us in Christ. God the Son cannot fail and did not fail in accomplishing our salvation in his obedience, death, and resurrection. And God the Spirit cannot fail in bringing us to Christ and keeping us forever united with Christ for our salvation. And so the baptism of Jesus then shows us that as believers in Jesus Christ, our assurance of salvation, our hope of glory is grounded in nothing less than the infallible will and work of each divine person in the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. And I can't think of a greater ground or foundation for our assurance of salvation than that.

Lesson One: Jesus Identified With Us in Our Sin to Take Away Our Sin

Now, there are three lessons that I'd like us to take away from our passage this morning. And the first lesson is this: In His baptism, Jesus identified with us in our sin in order to take away our sin.

Again, Jesus was not baptized for himself. He did not need a baptism of repentance, but he was baptized for you as a believer in Jesus Christ. And in his baptism, he took on your identity as one who is a sinner before God. And he did that so that at the cross, he could bear the judgment of God on your behalf.

And one thing that this means is that Jesus, he did not accomplish your salvation by meeting you halfway. Jesus doesn't say to you, "I'll wait for you to become a little bit more like me. I'll wait for you to become a little more righteous, a little more moral and Christ-like. And once you become a little more righteous and moral, once you begin to make some progress, then I'll come to you and I'll meet you where you are there and you'll be saved." Well, the problem with that is that can never work because by nature we are dead in our sins and trespasses. Because

we are dead in sin, we are utterly incapable of making even the slightest progress in righteousness or holiness or pleasing God.

And so Jesus did what he had to do in order to save us from our sin. He had to become fully like us. He had to meet us where we were, and where were we? We were in a place of utter helplessness and hopelessness, spiritual death and depravity. That's where Jesus met us. And he took to himself our identity as sinners, dead in sin, helpless. And he placed upon himself the entirety of our sin and guilt before God. And he bore in himself the full judgment of God that we deserve for our sin.

And this is all just another way of saying that if you belong to Jesus Christ by faith, if he is your savior from sin and death, then you are saved entirely by grace, by the grace of God. And so in every way, as we consider the ministry of Jesus, from his baptism here, to the perfectly obedient life that he led, to his crucifixion, he did all things in your place, in your stead, for you, so that you might have his sinlessness, so that his perfect righteousness may be counted and reckoned to you as your very own. The Apostle Paul really gives us, in one verse, a perfect commentary on the significance of the baptism of Jesus for our salvation. He says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, Jesus was made sin, and part of his being made sin was that he identified with us in his baptism as though he himself were with us in our sin.

Lesson Two: Jesus Set an Example for Us to Identify With Others

The second lesson is this: In his baptism, Jesus identified with us in our sin in order to set an example for us.

And so Jesus sets an example for us in what he did here. He not only made himself like us in being baptized by John, but throughout his ministry, Jesus was a friend to sinners. And Jesus was not just a friend to respectable sinners, those who could keep their sins within proper bounds, but Jesus was a friend to the most scandalous and notorious sinners: prostitutes, tax collectors, the promiscuous, the outcast.

And I wonder, if Jesus was still on earth today and still carrying out his ministry on earth today, I wonder if we might not be a little uneasy, a little uncomfortable with the kinds of people that I believe Jesus would befriend and spend time with. In our context today, I could imagine Jesus

making friends and ministering to drug addicts, criminals, prostitutes, homosexuals, the homeless. And that might make us a little uncomfortable.

Now, we are all ready to admit that we are sinners in need of grace. We are all ready to admit and say that we are no better than any other sinful person in this world. But isn't it true that some kinds of people are harder to identify with and are more uncomfortable to interact with and spend time with because of the nature of their sin? We like people, we like to be with people who are very much like us: hardworking, decent, upright, respectable. And those are all good things, praiseworthy things. But are you willing to come along with someone whose sin is much more scandalous, whose sin is uglier than yours, whose sin is more outwardly immoral than your own sin? Are you willing to come along someone like that and say to them, although you wouldn't say these very words, but you would have this attitude: "I am just like you. I, too, am a sinner. I, too, am saved only by the grace and the mercy of God because Jesus was a friend to me, because Jesus was a friend to sinners. I am a friend to you, though you, too, are a sinner."

And how about us as a church? Are we willing to welcome the person who comes into our worship service, the person whose very appearance tells us that he has made a complete wreck of his life, that he has lived a dissolute, immoral lifestyle? Are we ready to come alongside such a person and say, "We too are broken and poor sinners as well. Welcome to our congregation. We love the Lord Jesus Christ. We worship the Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Not because he loves the righteous and the moral and the good and the religious, but because he came into the world to save sinful people just like me and just like you." Or do we communicate the message that the only people welcome here are the ones whose lives are neat and tidy and all squared away? Those who are respectable, those who are presentable in polite society.

If the sinless Son of God was willing to identify with us in our sin, shouldn't we be just as willing to identify with others in their sin? Shouldn't we be willing to acknowledge and say, "But for the grace of God, that would be me." And so, since we know that we are just as needy, since we know that we are just as desperate for the grace of God as anybody else, we ought to be ready to come alongside and to befriend those and to identify with them, just as Jesus was willing to identify with us.

Lesson Three: Jesus Identified With Us to Make Us Sons of God

Thirdly and finally, in his baptism, Jesus identified with us in our sin in order to make us sons of God.

When the father spoke from heaven and said, "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased," there's a sense in which he wasn't just speaking about Jesus, but he was also speaking about all those who belong to Jesus. When Jesus took our place and bore the judgment for our sin, he also gave us his status, his sonship. Jesus is the beloved son of God. He is God's eternally begotten son, whom God loved and continues to love from all eternity to all eternity. But by faith in Jesus Christ, you too are a son of God. You are a child of God as well. You too are the object of the love of God.

In fact, that union that you have with Christ is so complete, so comprehensive, that you are just as much the object of the love of the Father as the Son of God, Jesus Christ is. God loves you with that same divine fatherly love with which he loves his only begotten Son. And so, despite our natural unworthiness, despite the fact that we continue to struggle with sin, despite the fact that we fail many, many times to honor God as believers in Jesus Christ, nevertheless, as a believer in Christ, as one who hopes in Jesus Christ, what does God see when he looks down on you? As you are in Christ, he sees a beloved son of God, daughter of God.

And so the words that the father declared concerning his son, Jesus, he also says about you: "This is my beloved son. This is my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased."

Let's pray.