

**“I’LL BE THE SINNER”**  
**Lk 3:15-22; Is 43:1-7; Rom 6:1-11**

***“The people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ . . .”***

Imagine the scene in Jordan! Excitement was in the air. People were flocking from everywhere – Jerusalem, Judea, even the farthest corners of the land. Young and old, rich and poor, everyone was drawn to this unusual figure named John.

For 400 years, God's Word had been silent, But John, this prophet, broke that silence. He preached with passion, calling people to turn away from their sins. And he baptized, offering the hope of forgiveness. Could this be it? Could this be the Messiah they had been waiting for?

**“No,”** John declared, his voice firm. Faces no doubt fell, shoulders no doubt slumped. Disappointment no doubt washed over them, like the feeling when you tear open that Christmas present you've been dreaming of, only to find it's sock and underwear. “Oh, just what I needed/wanted!” you EXCLAIM, trying desperately to mask your disappointment.

***“I’m not the Messiah. But the one you are waiting for, the one far greater than I, is coming. He is beyond compare. I am not even worthy to stoop down and untie the straps of his sandals.”***

It must have been hard for the people to understand. Someone greater than John? The man who drew massive crowds to the Jordan River? Leaders in Jerusalem were even talking about him! John had become a sensation, He'd gone viral, we might say today. He was fearless, even confronting powerful figures like King Herod!

But John wasn't being modest, he was being honest. He recognized his own sinfulness, acknowledging that he was unworthy to even approach the Messiah, let alone ask for anything. And that's the truth for us too!

Imagine this: Jesus, the Messiah, approaches John. The one whose sandals John wasn't even worthy to untie, asks John to baptize *Him*. The sinless One, baptized by a sinner! It seems completely backwards, doesn't it? John certainly thought so.

But this isn't the God we often imagine. This is a God who doesn't demand we come to Him, but who comes to us! A God who doesn't require us to clean ourselves up, but comes to clean us. He doesn't operate according to our human logic or expectations.

Many people find this hard to accept. They think God should behave differently, more in line with their own ideas. When God doesn't fit their preconceived notions, they question His existence or dismiss Him as foolish.

But God is not what we expect. He is a God who... who walks among us!

But it's even more astonishing than that. The God who is perfect in every way... submits to being baptized! Why? He didn't need to. He did it for us.

- Born for us.
- Lived for us.
- Crucified for us.
- Baptized for us.

He didn't have to do any of it. Yet, in His boundless love, He came to us, becoming one of us, descending to the depths of our sinfulness.

Stepping into the Jordan River, it was as if Jesus declared, **“I’LL BE THE SINNER, and you’ll be the Son.”** He took our place, and in His baptism, we’re united with Him.

This is the incredible truth: we, sinners, can truly call ourselves children of God. How can this be? Because in baptism, Jesus made it so.

Isaiah hinted at this incredible exchange in our Old Testament reading, declaring that God would give ***Egypt, Cush, and Seba as ransom for Israel***. But to redeem not just Israel, but the entire world, an even greater ransom was needed: **God's own Son**.

And today, in the Jordan River, that redemptive work began in public. Until now, Jesus had lived a relatively hidden life. Born in obscurity in Bethlehem, raised in the quiet village of Nazareth. Only a few knew His true identity – the shepherds, the wise men, Simeon and Anna... but now, the time for secrecy was over.

The Father and the Holy Spirit made this moment undeniable. The Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and the Father's voice thundered from heaven, proclaiming, ***“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”***

Today, we witness the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – revealed at the Jordan River.

The King of creation enters His own creation, not as a conqueror, but as a Savior. He comes to rescue us, to offer us Himself.

"So God, the King, enters the waters of baptism, joining sinners – every sinner, big or small. It began in the Jordan, but Jesus promised that any water, when joined with His Word, becomes a life-giving source, overflowing with grace. This is the new birth, the washing away of sins through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord declares, ***“I baptize you.” “You are my beloved son, my beloved daughter.” “I forgive you all your sins.”*** And so it is. Just as God spoke creation into existence, so too, His Word in baptism brings about this wondrous transformation. His Word is powerful, alive, and always accomplishes its purpose.

When that powerful, living, and active Word was spoken over you, you received the gift of the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of your sins. The Father is now well pleased with you!

The exchange is complete. Jesus, the Son, is united with you in baptism, and you, a sinner, are united with Him.

As the Apostle Paul explained to the Romans today, in baptism, we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection. Our old sinful selves are crucified with him, and we are raised to new life, free from the power of sin and death.

Baptism is a profound exchange: our death for his life. He, the innocent, died in our place, and through baptism, we share in his resurrection, receiving eternal life. All this is possible because of the incredible ransom he paid for our freedom.

And so that all might receive this precious gift, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – our Triune God sent the apostles out to share this good news. Jesus commanded them, **“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”**

We call this the Office of the Keys, an image Jesus himself used. It refers to the unique authority Christ has granted to His Church on earth – the power to forgive the sins of repentant sinners.

This is the gift John the Baptist sought to offer King Herod. He preached repentance, striving to unlock the prison of sin that held Herod captive. Tragically, Herod, instead of receiving this precious gift, imprisoned and ultimately killed John.

It's a stark reminder that some people reject God's offer of grace. They only desire forgiveness on their own terms, refusing to accept the true path to freedom.

Neither Herod's wife (whom he had wrongly taken from his brother Philip), nor his wealth, nor his power – none of these could offer him the true life he desperately needed. We often make the same mistake, seeking life in the fleeting things of this world.

But there is only one true source of life, and He has entrusted His Church with the keys to unlock that life for others. We are called to proclaim this good news, to pour out God's grace, to feed His sheep, to bring life to those dead in their sins and set free those imprisoned by sin and death.

This doesn't give us license to sin. As Paul warned, we are not to presume upon God's grace. ***"Should we continue in sin so that grace may abound?"*** Who would willingly return to prison after being set free? Yet, sadly, we sometimes make that foolish choice.

But even then, Jesus welcomes us back. His forgiveness is boundless, overflowing, and beyond our comprehension. It surpasses the waters of the Jordan. His forgiveness is for all, and greater than all.

Therefore, repent, John declares. Your Savior comes, All your sins are forgiven, Jesus declares. Now, Jesus says, ***"Receive My Body and Blood, the same Body and Blood that stood in the Jordan for you that day."***

***"Receive this strength, this communion with Me. Go forth, live a life of freedom from sin, and walk in joy and peace."***

All this began when Jesus stepped into the Jordan River that day and was baptized. And it continues each time a child of God is baptized.

You may not remember the day of your baptism, but your Father in heaven certainly does. Just as you don't remember the day of your birth, but your earthly parents cherish that memory. Baptism is a day of profound significance, the beginning of your eternal life, just as birth marks the beginning of your earthly life.

These are precious gifts from your Triune God. Or as Isaiah put it in our Old Testament reading:

***But now thus says the Lord,  
He who created you, O Jacob,  
He who formed you, O Israel:  
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are Mine."***

In the Name of Jesus, Amen.