

Wednesday Reflection

Title: Fulfilling Righteousness

Date: January 11, 2026

ID: Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

Scripture: Matthew 3:13-17

I refer to W. D. Davis and Dale C. Allison. The Gospel According to St. Matthew. Vol. 1. T&T Clark Ltd. 1988.

I use NABRE, the translation of the bible used at Catholic worship.

Text: Jesus says his baptism by John is “fitting...to fulfill all righteousness.” The line perplexes Scripture scholars. Davis and Allison offer many scholarly interpretations. They conclude that they cannot go beyond the inventory. They write, “We remain in the dark” (p. 323). In the spirit of fools-rushing in, my meditation takes me to this point: The baptism of the Lord by John is Jesus’s public, visible acceptance of the truth of the Incarnation, the truth of God-in-the-flesh.

Matthew alludes to the universal condition of humanity in three ways: (1) He insists that John’s baptism was for the forgiveness of sin (3:6 and 3:11). Everyone sins. (2) The reference to sin, however, was not to inflict guilt or to beat people down. Repentance was preparation for the kingdom of heaven. John and Jesus preached the kingdom in identical terms (3:2; 4:17). They enkindled humanity’s deepest, common hopes. (3) Matthew attempted to overcome the establishment’s prejudice regarding Galilee. He placed the man from “Galilee of the Gentiles” (4:16) with people from “Jerusalem, all Judea, and the region around the Jordan” (3:5). The Gospel of John is more explicit about this prejudice (John 1:46 and 7:53). Before today’s Gospel, John warned the elite that God can raise up children of Abraham from stones (3:9). The reference to new children of Abraham reminds the reader that Matthew’s genealogy intended to unite all people, Jew and Gentile. Christians understand that we live in Christ. Uniting in Him adopts Gentiles into Jesus’s family. All who share Jesus’s life, therefore, become children of Abraham. Jesus intended to unite God’s entire family; he is brother to us all. The references to our common humanity create the environment for Jesus to demonstrate his acceptance of the truth of the Incarnation. He embraces humanity to save humanity. The Catechism summarizes the truth by quoting St. Athanasius: “The Son of God became man so that we might become God” (para. 460, p. 116).

In John’s Gospel, God the Father and God the Son seem to converse before inaugurating God’s plan (John 6: 37-40). The Father instructs the Son to promise believers salvation, to assure us of eternal life. If I am right about his baptism, Jesus is communicating to us that the Son wanted to be born in time and place because the Father and Son desired to save humankind. The Father and the Son wanted to show us a new way to be in this world while anticipating the next.

The baptism of Jesus is a public, visible embrace of humanity. The Lord’s baptism, therefore, raises humankind’s valuation. We are not mired in sin and guilt; we are on our way to salvation. The baptism sets the stage for the articulation of humankind’s divine potential and possibility, the Beatitudes (5:3-12) and the entire Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7). No one has revealed humankind’s divine potential better.