

To Fulfill All Righteousness  
Sunday, January 12, 2020 at The First Congregational Church of  
Marshalltown, Iowa

Matthew 3:15 "But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he allowed Him."

Introduction: In the Catholic church, the priest has a sort of hallow baton with a saltshaker top filled with holy water, and during appropriate masses, he uses it to sprinkle the congregation while calling out, "remember your baptism". I once had a dream in which the priest had went so long without using that instrument that he did not know that rust had built up inside, coloring the holy water. He also did not screw the top on tightly. Such are my dreams. But the baptism of Jesus says much about why He came to earth, and about the course of life symbolized by baptism.

Set the Stage

John, the cousin of Jesus, begins preaching in the wilderness of Judea and somehow he gains a lot of attention. He doesn't speak in the center of town. There is no advertisement. Yet out in the country he preaches to whoever comes, calling on them to repent and be baptized. John himself was a rugged fellow who proved that he had yet to complete his "Dale Carnegie" course when the religious leadership of the area came to investigate. He called them a "brood of vipers" and spoke of the fires of judgment and of the Holy Spirit, as if the choice was between one or another. When Jesus came to be baptized, there may have been a large crowd around them, but they still had time to talk. John thought that Jesus should be baptizing him, understandably so, but Jesus politely asked to be humored, saying it was to "fulfill all righteousness." When He came up out of the water, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended and landed upon Him. A voice came from heaven, saying, "this is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

The Spirit of God descends as a dove upon Him.

### -Harbinger of a New World

A descent of the Holy Spirit is significant. First of all, the dove is symbolic as a harbinger of a new world. In the episode of Noah and the Ark, our hero's first hint that the flood is receding and a new world is coming is when a dove returned with the leaf of an olive tree in its mouth. (Genesis 8:8-12) Since then, the dove represented the next world, heaven, entering into our lives on earth. The involvement of the dove in the Baptism of the Lord Jesus heaven coming to us when we couldn't come to heaven.

### -Doves were sacrificial animals

The dove symbolized gentleness, innocence and meekness, and was an option as a sacrificial animal for those who were poor. Mary and Joseph, after Jesus was born, presented Him to God in the temple and the presentation included turtledoves, as Mary and Joseph were poor. To include a dove in the baptism of Jesus reminded us that gentleness, innocence and meekness were characteristics of a Spirit-filled person, and that the life of a Christian can involve sacrifice along the way. (Leviticus 12:6; 14:22; see Luke 2:24)

Application: Baptism represents new life, filled with the Spirit and dedicated to others. As Christ lived for you, you live for Him, willing to sacrifice for the sake of others, and a harbinger of the world yet to come. It is wise to periodically reflect on your baptism.

### Conclusion

Remember your baptism. Remember what it means for Christ to be baptized for you and what your baptism means. I don't have one of those special instruments they use in Catholic masses, but take time to consider your baptism, and the course of life on which it set you. Remember that the Christian life can involve sacrifice, and that it involves also the Holy Spirit, who brings us in contact with heaven and the world to come.