

SERMON
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Epiphany 1, A, Baptism of Our Lord - January 11, 2026
Isaiah 42:1-9 Acts 10:34-43 Matthew 3:13-17

WHY SHOULD Jesus be baptized?

John was baptizing people “for the forgiveness of sins”.

The Christian Church has always taught that

- Jesus was completely without sin.
- In the Holy Scriptures, even the dying thief on the cross
- testified that Jesus had done nothing wrong.

So why should Jesus be baptized?

John the Baptist had the same question.

- In fact, he was so bothered by it that
- he would have prevented Jesus from being baptized.

But Jesus INSISTED. He sought baptism

“to fulfill all righteousness”

He said.

Already here at the beginning of his ministry,

- Jesus was acting as Savior--
- identifying Himself with sinners
- for whom He would one day die,

- as the one who knew no sin becoming sin for us
- and dying for us as the Lamb of God
- who takes away the sins of the world.

AND by LIVING in a perfect way, also fulfilling the Law for us in that way.

By His Baptism Jesus is ALSO clearly SETTING THE EXAMPLE

- for what is to be done by OTHERS.
- He wanted them also to be baptized.
- He did what he did as BOTH SAVIOR AND EXAMPLE.

This morning let's take SOME time first of all

- to reflect upon the importance of examples

It has often been said that a good example is the best sermon.

- OUR example can be the greatest gift we can ever give to others.
- And we don't have to be rich or famous or powerful
- to give that precious gift.

We all know how important it is in families

- for the older child to be a good example for younger siblings.
- I am a pastor because of the EXAMPLES given by the pastors I had
- while growing up,
- not because of any particular personal words of encouragement from them.
- In fact, I think my home pastor was shocked when I told him.

(- And some of you may be quietly thinking

- "I can understand that.")

On the other hand, as a French proverb puts it,

"Nothing is more CONTAGIOUS than a bad example."

A bad example often has pandemic-like results

- as its influence spreads like a virus.

Some of you with teaching experience of one kind or another

- know that if one child is allowed to misbehave in a classroom,
- complete chaos is likely to follow.

Poor examples

- can even be responsible for killing
- others' spiritual and even physical lives.
- Think of the eldest child in a family becoming addicted to drugs,
- and the danger of that example for the younger siblings.

So what examples are WE giving?

- That question can easily make most of us uncomfortable.

Parents are often unpleasantly shocked

- by how easily their children begin to imitate
- their parents' own WORST habits
- and WORST personality traits.

Most parents know what it's like to suddenly realize that they

- are giving a very bad example,
- and that they are being observed
- by their impressionable children
- and sometimes also their children's friends.

It is not a good feeling, and it should not be.....

But if we think back

- and try to identify people
- who had the greatest positive influence on our lives--
- I suspect it will likely be someone the world might not have noticed at all,
- yet someone who greatly influenced us by her or his example--
- someone whose way of living and thinking
- and believing and caring
- became a pattern for us because it seemed so right.

The people we likely remember with most affection and appreciation

- are people who cared about us--
- and people who changed OUR lives for the better
- BY THEIR EXAMPLES--
- especially CHRIST-LIKE examples.

Keep in mind that the Lord Jesus

- actually strengthened the Commandments in His teaching.
- He pointed people to those commandments' true intent
- and to their own hearts.

For example,

- in referring to the Fifth Commandment about not killing others,
- He taught that hatred in our heart
- was already a breaking that commandment.

And that obedience was not just going through some outward motions

- but truly loving God and our neighbor.

He gave us the example

- of the Good Samaritan's not passing by on the other side of the road,
- but stopping to bandage the wounds of the injured man
- and paying for his stay at an inn so that he could recover there.

Then He Himself acted as the Good Samaritan for us all,

- binding up our wounds,
- paying the ultimate price for our healing.

He went on to give His disciples a whole new commandment,

“Love one another as I have loved you.”

He did not come to abolish the Law,

- but to clarify and strengthen its observance.

We do need to beware of putting too much confidence

- in **our own ability** to be good examples,
- let alone a perfect example as Jesus was.

Strive to be the very best examples we can possibly be,

- by all means.
- Nothing in life is more important.

But know that when you fail, as, for example,

- most every parent does at times,
- we should not be surprised--
- and especially not become too discouraged to keep trying.

Not giving up after a failure

- is also a very, very important example to give,
- as is the example of asking and giving forgiveness for failures
- when they do occur.

There IS something very wonderful that happens

- when we do follow the perfect example of Jesus,
- especially in His selfless love for others--
- and in His forgiving,
- and in His clear, fearless rejection of evil.

We feel right,

- clean inside,
- as though we are being what God intends for us and made us to be--
- and that was in God's own words, "very good."

Yet there are heavy forces working against us.

- Moral CONFUSION is the mark of our times.
- Academics convincing many there can be no moral absolutes,
- so anything goes--
- because most anything can be justified by fallen human reason
- especially when God is erased from the thinking of a person.

Often, as was the case with Adam and Eve,

- there is BLAMING OTHERS OR CIRCUMSTANCES
- for the **causes** of moral failures
- and breaking of law.

So stealing is to be excused if a person is troubled by poverty.

- Behavior that destroys educational systems
- is to be expected due to family disintegration,
- especially no fathers.

And family disintegration is really the fault

- of our not spending enough on social relief programs,

And so on....

- So personal responsibility is ignored.
- with little emphasis at all on the power of personal example-giving.

I think of the very rough circumstances in which Abraham Lincoln grew up,

- and his determination not to be defined by them--
- along with countless other inspiring examples.

In churches,

- what is called by the big word “antinomianism” is again in vogue.
- The word literally means “against the law.”

In the Church,

- it is the MISunderstanding that since we are no longer “under the law”
- but “under grace”,
- basically ANYTHING GOES--
- usually as long as we can somehow define that “anything”
- as done “with love”.

And again, our fallen human nature

- can manage to excuse most anything as the loving thing to do.

In effect, antinomians come to similar conclusions

- about moral values as atheists.

For atheists, since is no God, there are no sins

- because there is no divine being to offend

- or divinely given laws to break.

There were antinomians already in New Testament times,

- a problem St. Paul addressed in the sixth chapter of Romans,
- about the meaning of our Baptism--
- words that were part of today's Epistle.

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” - 6:1-2

Bottom line: We are to strive to be good examples even in these times.

But thankfully Jesus Christ came to be there for us

- also when we fail to be like Him,
- sometimes when we feel horrible about who we are--
- because of giving some terrible example of behavior,
- maybe just a momentary but still major slip.

It is exactly then that are to realize

- that Jesus came to be MUCH more than your and my example.

He came to be our SAVIOR,

- to do for us what we cannot manage do for ourselves.
- He came to win our FORGIVENESS.

And, strangely enough,

- it is exactly when we take most seriously

- following Him and his example,
- it is then that we are most conscious of wrong within
- AND are drawn most close to Him as Savior.

Those who truly try to follow Jesus in his ways of

- unconditional love,
- faith no-matter-what,
- and total obedience
- are also quickly saved from self-righteous attitudes
- that could turn them into “holier than thou” types.

Those who try most seriously to follow his example

- see most clearly why Jesus needed to come to be Savior from sin,
- beginning with their own sin.

And it is EXACTLY THEN,

- in recognizing him also as OUR Savior,
- that we find power to pick up the broken pieces
- of our own failed examples,
- and to begin all over again fresh and new,
- to try our best again
- to imitate Him who faithfully cares so deeply for us all....

Our Savior's care is not at all dependent

- on how well we do in following--
- **but for us while we are still SINNERS.**

Saving faith in Him definitely involves following Him and His example.

- But it is also all about new beginnings
- because it is about **certain** forgiveness--
- about hope and love that never dies,
- just as our Savior now lives to be with us eternally.

When Jesus came to John at the Jordan,

- it was not a spur of the moment impulse.
- He came IN ORDER to be baptized.

It was his intention.

It was planned.

It was also for us--

- about being for each one of us
- BOTH example and Savior.

And He is all that still, even in these confused times.

- Because He has come as the ETERNAL FRIEND OF SINNERS,
- **the same yesterday, today and forever.** Amen.